Short Stories.

No. 705.) Week Ending July 5th, 1902. (Price One Penny.

Suddenly a rending noise arose; there was a rumble and a splash. Richard Pascoe had fallen into his own ingenious and fatal trap.

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(A Thrilling Incident from our Powerful Story, "THE OTHER WOMAN." See first page.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 705.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending July 5th, 1902.

THE OTHER WOMAN.

A Powerful Story of Love and Hate.

Complete Short Story.

CHAPTER I.
A Basket of Strawberries.

"AND I say he's making a fool of you, Diamond—well, Miss Abbot, if you like that better—as any young swell can make a fool of a girl who happens to be out of his own class. White hands and smart clothes and a little flattery count for a lot with a woman, but they won't mend a broken heart or take the place of a comfortable home and a wedding ring. Your precious Mr. Garner will end by jilting you, as sure as my name's Dick Pascoe, and then you'll be sorry you didn't snap at me."

There was an unmistakable interruption, the stamp of a small, firmly-shod foot upon the plank floor of a green-painted, low-roofed verandah in which the speaker sat by a bamboo table, over a crumbled roll and a half-empty tea-cup.

"If you should want anything else, Mr. Pascoe," he was told, "perhaps you won't mind ringing, I—we are rather busy this morning."

"That's a fib, that won't satisfy me," retorted Richard Pascoe ungallantly, breaking a piece of sugar and flinging the fragments at a group of sparrows that were pecking about the verandah; "there's not a customer on this side of the house and won't be till Garner—confound him!—comes back for his usual eleven o'clock second breakfast and flirtation. Why can't you be honest and confess that you hate the sight of me?"

Diamond Abbot fingered a cluster of drooping carnations at the bosom of her black silk blouse; a faint flush stole into her cheeks, crept to her temples, and vanished under the loose curls of her brown tresses.

"I—I don't hate the sight of you, Mr. Pascoe," she answered, "but I do wish you wouldn't worry over me so much, and wouldn't be always—always sneering at Mr. Garner. If you had ever noticed his hands you would see that they are as brown as a berry, and he isn't a bit particular about his clothes being smart; at all events, when he is working down yonder. He doesn't seem to care what he does to hurry the men on—that is, he didn't before the strike broke out and stopped the works altogether."

Richard Pascoe looked over the hotel verandah to where, at the further extremity of its sloping lawn and dusty shrubberies, the shallow waters of the Dene swept by on their way from the port of Coldharbour to the sea, past the mouth of the sandy creek near which the hotel stood. A great trench bordered the flat shore of the river, shut off from the stream by an embankment, surmounted by a temporary railway, which was carried across the creek by a wooden viaduct built upon piles.

In the trench itself long rows of contractors' wagons, filled with excavated earth, baked in the mellow June sunshine, and steam "navvies" idly extended their steel jaws towards the walls of the cutting. But the men that should have been toiling like busy ants in the huge bed of the unfinished Coldharbour Ship Canal, were lounging by the hundred about the narrow streets of Port Skillion, the works depôt of the Coldharbour Ship Canal Company, whose operations promised one day to restore to Coldharbour itself something of its old prosperity. Beyond the canal a few coasters tacked inward along the dangerous channel of the silting-up river, and vast stretches of tawny sand gleamed wetly in the sun.

"Ay," said Richard Pascoe, getting up from his seat after a moment's apparent consideration of the prospect; "our friend Garner hasn't spared himself the last month or two, I grant you. No wonder; Sir James West, the chairman of the company, is a sort of patron of his, and Kenneth Garner has tumbled to the fact that Sir James has a pretty daughter. Lilian West is a splendid creature—all red-gold hair and creamy complexion. If the canal is a success Sir James will be an immensely rich man—he has bought a lot of land in Coldharbour and the canal should double its value. 'Brilliant young engineer—financier's beautiful and only child'—it will be quite a Society romance."

He was glancing covertly at the girl beside him. Diamond Abbot had grown very pale and she drew her hand sharply from the flowers at her breast. Her tormentor went on deliberately as he paid down the amount of his bill upon the table.

"You didn't suppose there wasn't another woman, did you," he added with a harsh laugh; "in cases like these there always is and it's the other woman that wins. Consider the difference between Miss Lilian West, of Berkshire and Mayfair, and little Diamond Abbot, of the Port Skillion Hotel, a local belle and licensed victualler's daughter."

Richard Pascoe lighted himself a cigarette and puffed at it deliberately.

"By the by," he continued, "Sir James is in Coldharbour at present and is coming over to meet the strike-leaders, I believe Miss West is to be with him. So get a glimpse of her if you can, and then you can tell me what you think of your rival. *Au revoir*, I must get back to the Canal office and keep my subordinates in order—the strike is demoralising even us clerks."

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Diamond was galled into anger by his insolent air of patronage.

"Mr. Pascoe," she exclaimed desperately, "I don't believe a word of what you say about Mr. Garner, and what is more, I don't believe you believe it yourself. You would only like to."

And with this downright, if slightly incoherent declaration, she moved away. The chief clerk strode after her, his face crimsoned by a sudden passion. It seemed as though Diamond's chance arrow had unexpectedly hit the mark.

"Very well, Di!" he cried, hoarsely, "stick to your infatuation if you choose. But mark me, it will bring you no luck, no luck!—nor will it bring any to Kenneth Garner, either."

Not pausing to witness the effect of his grim prophecy, he swung round, and descending the steps of the verandah, hastened athwart the lawn of the hotel towards the road below.

Diamond gazed after him abstractedly—she was pondering his reference to Kenneth Garner and Lilian West.

"It wasn't true," she said to herself; "I know it wasn't true!"

"What wasn't true?" demanded a cheerful voice. Diamond turned. A young and masculine figure—tanned, athletic and set off by a big Panama and a breezy grey suit—stalked on to the verandah. Diamond smiled brightly.

"Good morning, Mr. Garner," she answered; "I was just thinking, and I expect I spoke aloud without meaning to. Will you have anything to eat with your coffee this morning?—you went out in such a hurry I hadn't time to ask."

Kenneth Garner tossed his hat on to a chair, deposited by it a tissue paper package and clasped his querist's hands.

"My second breakfast is a fraud, Diamond," he responded; "it serves merely as an excuse for a chat with you. But how formal we are to-day!—you will have me saying Miss Abbot next, and I understood distinctly that I was to be allowed 'Diamond.' What a queer little name—shall I ever get used to it? And yet you are a jewel among women."

Diamond released herself gravely. "That is a compliment I am quite accustomed to," she assured him; "my name provokes everyone to it. And you haven't told me if you want anything with your coffee or not."

"Coffee be—hanged!" ejaculated Kenneth Garner; "I'm in a tearing rush this morning, and must dispense with it. Sir James West, the chairman of the Canal company, is coming down this afternoon to see the strike-leaders. But I didn't forget your flower, and a better one than yesterday. I was really ashamed of those carnations, they were half-dead when I gave them to you."

He caught up his hat again and took out of it a half-dewy, open rose, dripping and pink as a girl's first blush. Diamond accepted it with a murmur of delight; Kenneth availed himself of the transfer to repossess himself of her hands.

"You can't guess," he whispered, "how happy it makes me to see you wear my flowers, Diamond, I—I wish you wouldn't take a single blossom from anybody else."

Diamond laughed coquettishly and would have slipped away without answering. But he detained her gently.

"There," he said, "I have no right to ask that. Yet do me a favour. Let me see you fasten my rose at your breast."

With fingers trembling irrepressibly, Diamond obeyed him. Kenneth Garner relieved her of the deposed carnations and laid them in his pocket-book.

"Since you have worn them," he observed, sentimentally, "they shall not be thrown away. And, now," he added, "I must recollect that I am here more or less on business. I want to bring Sir James here for a cup of tea about four, after the conference with the strike-leaders is over. Talking is a dry job and it will be a dusty drive back to Coldharbour in Sir James' motor-car."

He reached to the package he had laid down and unfastened it—it contained a basket of perfect strawberries, large, ripe and of a costly variety.

"A lady will be with us," he said; "Miss West, Sir James' daughter, so I took the precaution to order these from Coldharbour. She is fond of fruit." He glanced at his watch.

"By Jupiter!" he cried, "I must beat a retreat. Good-bye—see that I sustain my reputation as a host with Miss West and her father."

Diamond looked at the strawberries as he went out by the way that Richard Pascoe had gone.

"So these are for Miss West," she remarked; "and he knew that she likes them. I—I wonder if Miss—Miss Lilian is very pretty."

She crossed the verandah and entered the empty sitting-room of the hotel. As she did so she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror, slender, dark-eyed, a little pale, with the rose-bud, a touch of colour at her bosom. She put up her hand, as if to take it away, but left it where it was.

"If I could really doubt him," he said to herself; "even for a minute—I should deserve it to be true."

CHAPTER II.
"Mr. Pascoe was Right."

"I believe, Mr. Garner, that even my pet Bond Street tea-room must yield the palm to this quaint old hotel. Henceforth I shall pity you no longer. Here have I been imagining you vegetating in a muddy wilderness, waiting for the end of this stupid strike, while you have really been living in clover. Don't you think, papa, that Mr. Garner is guilty of obtaining sympathy under false pretences?"

Lilian West put down her tea-cup and leant back in a comfortable wicker lounge-chair. She was a tall, good-tempered, smartly-dressed blonde—the late afternoon sunshine glistened in her yellow locks and made the folds of her filmy muslin gown like gossamer. Her father—a big-limbed, corpulent, grey-moustached Englishman—smiled at her tolerantly.

"I can't say," she was told, "that Mr. Garner has ever tried to excite our sympathy. On the contrary, he has always been rather enthusiastic about his quarters. By the way, what a pretty girl that is waiting on us!—do you know, Lilian, I almost begin to suspect Garner's enthusiasm."

Kenneth Garner intervened—hastily—"I fancied, Sir James," he remarked, "that I had successfully cultivated the reputation of a man too absorbed in an arduous profession to spare time for the worship of beauty. Indeed, I understand that I am reported in some quarters to be nothing less than a woman-hater."

Sir James West wiped his long moustache and showed an excellent set of white teeth.

"I suspect that Lilian has her own opinion as to that," he chuckled.

Lilian laughed—a laugh with an odd inflection in it—and rose abruptly to gaze over the verandah railing at the dusty and deserted works of the canal.

"Are you wiseacres ever going to put an end to this provoking strike?" she said, evasively; "I want to see the big ships go up to Coldharbour as they used to do when I was a little tiny girl."

Her father coughed and his broad British face set sternly. "By Monday morning," he answered, "we send in fresh.

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hands to take the place of the strikers, unless they go in themselves. The leaders have forty-eight hours to consult their men."

Lilian studied the great trench and its bordering embankment. "They say," she murmured, "that the men have threatened, if you send in your fresh hands, to wreck the works. How—how would they do it?"

Sir James frowned. "Pierce the river-wall, perhaps," he rejoined, "and drown out everything in the canal-bed, or any other piece of wanton mischief that occurs to them."

His daughter gasped. "How wicked it would be!" she said, "and how un-English, wouldn't it?"

"It would, Miss West," agreed Kenneth Garner, "and so we must trust it won't be done. But we are taking every precaution. The embankment is well guarded, and I patrol it myself after dark on a light engine."

"But if they blew you up too," exclaimed Lilian West.

Kenneth Garner snapped his fingers carelessly.

"They won't do that," he replied; "I believe that they have a sort of weakness for me, on the whole."

Lilian came to his side as he sat at the dainty tea-table.

"You won't run any foolish risks, Mr. Garner," she said bravely; "I don't think my father's obstinacy is quite worth your life. If I had my way I should give the strikers their extra shilling, or whatever it is, and let the canal go on. Wouldn't you, Mr. Garner?"

Sir James pushed back his chair and rose also. "You don't comprehend the difference between profit and loss, my dear child," he told her, "and the company's engineer has to acquiesce in the view of his directors. Well, Garner, I think we'd better be off, for I dine in Coldharbour to-night with the Mayor. I'll just see if my motor is all right—the oil gave out and my mechanic has been ransacking the neighbourhood for more. You must run over to Coldharbour in it with us and tell me how you like it."

He walked off the verandah through the open windows of the hotel, turning to glance back rallyingly at the two he was leaving alone. Lilian West drew nearer to her companion.

"It works beautifully," she said, "the plan, not the motor; didn't you notice how the dear old thing tried to chaff us?"

Kenneth Garner sighed. "Yes," he admitted, "but I don't relish it, Miss West. It—it isn't quite fair to him. Of course I am yours to command, yet if—if it hadn't been you who persuaded Sir James to give me the chance of my life, I don't believe I ever should have consented—to—to——"

"To play the chivalrous knight to the lady in distress," concluded Lilian; "well, you have begun it now, and you may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Come on, I hear the coughing of the motor, so they've got it going again. We can cut through the garden, can't we—what a quaint, charming place this is!"

Kenneth Garner gave her his arm as they descended the wooden steps that led to the lawn, and they made for the front of the hotel side by side. When they had disappeared round the projecting angle, a little figure crept out of the room that opened on to the verandah, glided to the railing and looked over. It was Diamond Abbot.

"Mr. Pascoe was right," she said brokenly; "he is only amusing himself with me. It is Miss West he really loves."

She sat down in a niche of the verandah and buried her face in her hands. For some while she stayed thus—silently, hopelessly wretched. Suddenly a voice reached her ear—a voice husky, suppressed, and yet familiar. It came from a ramshackle arbour, on a lower level, that communicated with a bar of the hotel affected by its poorer patrons, and entered from a back street. Diamond peered through the railings and the creeper-covered roof of the arbour beneath.

A trio of men occupied the latter, lounging over empty pipes and glasses, and smoking clay pipes. Two were rough, corduroy-clad navvies, the third a fellow in a dirty top-coat and slouch-hat. It was his voice that had reached her, and he was still speaking.

"Why have I a grudge against this Garner?" he growled, "'cause I'm an honest working-man and he got me the sack off the canal, that's why. And if you want to know, it's him that's stiffening Sir James's back not to give you follows what you're asking. Once get him out of the road and you'll have a chance of scoring. Besides, it'll show them that you mean business and won't spite yourselves as much as wrecking the canal. I'd do the job myself, only I want help, and it's precious little I'm asking you to do. Is it a deal, or is it not?"

There was a moment's hesitation, and then a muttered assent. An emptying of glasses and a shuffling of feet followed, as the three took themselves off out of the arbour.

Diamond's heart was beating wildly. In spite of its assumed hoarseness and affected vulgarity, the voice that had attracted her attention was that of Richard Pascoe, and the square, strong form of the speaker—though disguised—was his.

Something evil was going to be done, and upon his instigation—something that threatened the safety, even the life, of Kenneth Garner. And it was Kenneth Garner whom she had just pronounced guilty of the greatest wrong a man can do to a loyal and loving woman.

CHAPTER III.

"Let me Say we are Betrothed."

"S-s-t! you fools! put some more grease on that saw, can't you? It's shrieking like a stuck pig, and the wind's not all that high."

The two dark figures thus roughly addressed ceased their labour. They were perched upon the stout beams of the little swinging wooden viaduct which had been built across the mouth of the wide creek near the Port Skillion Hotel in order that the miniature bay might remain open for traffic till the canal was practically completed. Over Port Skillion, the canal bed, and the vast, sandy stretches of the river, brooded a windy summer night.

"See here, mate," grumbled one of the toilers, with an oath, stiffening himself and wiping the perspiration from his brow with the back of a knotted fist; "who are you to be ordering us about like this? Tackle the job yourself if you're not satisfied—it's a danged dirty business, and I wish I was well out of it."

Their critic crawled forward over the wooden lattice-work, over which ran the metals of the contractor's railway, and bent down to take the end of a long, two-handed saw, pull it from the beam into which place it had bitten, and rub it with a lump of tallow. The man he had displaced, as if ashamed of his momentary spasm of conscience, went to the other side of the beam and helped to operate the keen tool. When it had severed three-quarters of the log, the chief of the two stopped.

"There!" he said, "that's the last, the weight of the engine will do the rest—Kenneth Garner will not make another round of his blessed embankment, I'll bet. Now be off, and remember, it's penal or the gallows for any man who breathes a word of this. The whole place is watched, so be careful how you go—we've not been a bit too quick—there's the moon. Mind, you idiots, and don't step on those sawn timbers—a touch will finish them."

He slid down between the beams, imitated by his assistants,

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just as the silver disc of the summer moon rose above the cloud masses behind Port Skillion.

"We'd better choose different ways," he told them, "so's not to render ourselves more conspicuous than we need. I'll go west, you can go east. Good night to you, and remember, a still tongue makes a wise, and especially, a safe head."

Agile as a cat, he swung himself from one part of the woodwork to another, moving in the direction of the nearest point at which the viaduct joined the embankment. A broad shaft of pallid light fell momentarily athwart his features from the drifting moon—they were those of Richard Pascoe.

His two allies growled a hoarse farewell and vanished in the gloom, while Richard Pascoe pursued his devious course. A faint sigh, like a heavily drawn breath, arrested him and he glanced up, straining his vision. Above him, crawling from sleeper to sleeper of the railway track, was the form of a woman. He dragged himself closer and peered at her. With a start he saw that she was Diamond Abbot and that she was looking down at him.

"You!" he whispered, shrinking back in astonishment, "what are you doing here, curse you?"

Diamond Abbot gazed at Richard Pascoe with a curious determination in her eyes. "I am going to save him," she said, "I heard you plotting in the arbour at the hotel, and as I could not find him to warn him I followed you—I have followed you for hours."

Richard Pascoe pulled himself up fiercely. "Yes," he exclaimed desperately; "the more unlucky you! I would have killed him because he stood between us, and now I shall have to kill you to save myself from the law."

He gained the elevated track at a bound and jumped towards her.

Diamond sprang to her feet and fled—in the direction of the spot at which the almost severed beams of the bridge still bore the weight of the metals and sleepers. In the windy gloom Richard Pascoe forgot his bearings and pursued her recklessly.

Headlong she darted down the line, springing from plank to plank as if she had been crossing a stream by stepping-stones. Under her, at the piles of the viaduct, the river lapped and sucked, and behind her came Richard Pascoe, with murder in his heart.

Unconscious of her exact peril, Diamond sped over the dangerous spot—in safety; her almost childish weight was too trifling to break through the last fibres of the severed beams. Suddenly a rending noise arose; there was a rumble, a splash, and twelve or fifteen feet of timber and metal collapsed at her back. With it had disappeared a reeling human figure—Richard Pascoe had fallen into his own ingenious and fatal trap.

Amazed, yet vaguely comprehending, with a thrill of pity, the catastrophe, Diamond stopped. While she hesitated, another sound reached her, the peculiar clanking of an engine running without a load to steady it. A star of light was nearing her along the embankment. She knew it for the headlight of the engine upon which, since the strikers had become threatening, Kenneth Garner had patrolled the all-important river-wall.

Horrified, yet galvanised into action, Diamond sped towards it, springing from sleeper to sleeper across the open water of the little bay, and calling, in broken girlish tones, a desperate warning.

A bronzed face glanced suddenly from the cab of the leisurely moving engine — a face that showed stern and anxious in the moonbeams and the yellow glare from the fire-box of the locomotive. An instant more and the engine had halted, dead—upon the brink of the fallen span. Diamond reached the metal step, gasped, tottered, caught at a strong hand, and fainted—to be drawn up into the arms of Kenneth Garner.

* * * * *

"Don't touch me!" said Diamond, indignantly, late that same night, as she lay on a sofa in the sitting-room of the Port Skillion Hotel, alone for a few moments with Kenneth Garner; "as if I didn't know all about the—the other woman."

The engineer stared at her. "The other woman, Diamond!" he exclaimed; "what in Heaven's name are you dreaming about?"

"I am not dreaming," faltered Diamond; "you love Miss West and you were only playing with me. But I couldn't help trying to save you, though I do wish that terrible Mr. Pascoe hadn't been killed."

"My dear little girl," answered Kenneth Garner, astonished, "you are talking in riddles, Pascoe killed!—myself in love with Lilian West!"

Diamond shuddered and lowered her voice. "The man that fell through the broken bridge," she said, "the one that was managing it all, was Mr. Pascoe—I recognised him at once. He—he was trying to revenge himself—on—on you—because he—fancied I cared for you. That was why he had disguised himself and tried to induce some of the men to attempt your life. It was he who told me about your being fond of Miss West. I said at first I didn't believe it, but—but afterwards when I had seen you and her together, I had to."

Kenneth Garner strove to grapple with the amazing piece of information he had just received.

"My poor Diamond," he said; "Pascoe was either lying outright, or else deceived, yet he came near the mark, for though Lilian West will never marry me, more than one person, including her father, supposes us in love. I have lent some support to that rumour—at Miss West's wish—she is devoted to a young soldier whom Sir James dislikes and while he suspects her of a passing interest in me, he relaxes his vigilance in another quarter. But this is a ghastly story about Pascoe. I am afraid it must all come out, too, which is worse. You—you must let me say we are betrothed, it will make things easier for you. Then, if you choose, we can break it off quietly."

Diamond covered her face. "You may punish me that way, if you like," she said, "I deserve it."

Her lover gathered her into her arms.

"You foolish child," he said; "as if you had not proved yourself a heroine. My life is not mine now, it is yours, to do what you like with."

"And what about Miss West and her soldier?" asked Diamond, some time after.

Kenneth Garner shrugged his shoulders.

"I know Sir James better than his daughter or he himself does," said the engineer; "he will relent—before his Lilian's heart is quite broken. Besides, he will be in great good humour for the next while. The strike is over—in a day or two we shall all be at work again upon the canal. Before the first ship goes up, my darling, you shall be Mrs. Garner."

R. Norman Silver.

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A Man, Two Maids, and Some Money.

Telling of the Transference of both Love and a Fortune.

MADGE sat before the drawing-room fire, apparently lost in thought. The cheerful blaze leapt and sank in the grate, casting audacious gleams amongst her wavy brown hair and dimpled mouth. Her eyes, so far as they were visible amongst the shadows, seemed to be troubled. But shadows, doubts, troubles, and everything else vanished in an instant when the door was flung wide open and a visitor strode into the room.

"Jack!" she cried delightedly, and with just a quiver in her voice—"Save me from my loneliness. Come and sit by the fire. How are you?"

"Going strong, with land in sight," he answered, cheerfully.

"Mabel is out in town."

"Oh, that's all right. It's you I want to see to-day, Madge. Shall I sit here?"

"Yes, anywhere." But she pulled her own chair back amongst the shadows as she spoke.

"You and I have always been good friends?"

"I suppose so—I hope so," she stammered.

The earnestness in his eyes deepened. He forgot the chair he had selected so carefully a moment before, and sprang to his feet.

"Look here, Madge," he blundered affectionately. "Dear old Madge, you and I have always been like brother and sister, but—I want—I hope——"

"We've been friends—and we are now—don't spoil our friendship," she whispered, with a sudden shrinking from her expected happiness.

"I want to be your brother in reality if you will have me."

"Jack?"

"Mabel accepted me last night," he said, "and I've come round now on purpose to tell you, although probably you already know all about it from Mabel. No? She's too shy. She's most bewitchingly shy," he added. "Shall I light up? Or will you draw your chair nearer—you look so lonely somehow in that dark corner."

"No, don't light the gas. I'm all right here."

"You know it isn't like an ordinary engagement, Madge. I mean you're not going to lose a sister but to gain a brother. And we'll keep a special cosy chair by the fireside—by our fireside—for you."

He continued in this way for another few minutes, and then he became vaguely aware that something was wrong. He felt just a little annoyed at the lack of interest in his love affairs shown by Madge. As a rule she was kindness and sympathy itself. The thought of these two qualities swung his mind in an instant round to Mabel. What a difference there was between the two sisters! He bade her good evening in a somewhat hurt tone and left the room.

Then she sank upon the sofa. The little brown head fell pitcously amongst the cushions and the bright eyes filled and overflowed. Two or three minutes later the door was opened again and a tall, loosely-built girl entered the room. Her face was attractive with that sort of empty prettiness which attracts a man for six months and estranges him for a lifetime. This was Madge's step-sister.

"Whatever's the matter?" she asked carelessly, and then, without waiting for an answer—"Has—have you had any visitors?"

"Jack has been here," said Madge steadily. "He has told me of your engagement. He's only just gone. I hope you will be very happy together."

"Naturally," simpered Mabel affectedly. "He's a good old boy though he's rather too much in earnest about me. But I'll soon cure him of that after we're married."

Madge looked at her in horror. This was not the spirit in which *she* would have considered Jack.

"You don't seem a bit pleased," said Mabel pettishly. "Did you want him yourself? Everything seems to go wrong to-day. That library book was out again, and now as soon as I get home you look at me as though I had committed a murder. You are not a bit nice to me."

She flounced angrily out of the room. And Madge stared with tear-dimmed eyes into the heart of the fire and found that pity for herself had given place to an all-absorbing helpless pity for Jack.

* * * * *

Apparently life in lodgings did not suit Madge. She had spent six weeks in one of these "Homes from Home," and already the bright eyes were dull and spiritless and the roguish dimples had retired, disgusted with their new environment.

Soon after the announcement of Mabel's engagement her step-father died very unexpectedly, apparently without having made a will. As Madge was only the daughter of his first wife Mabel inherited everything. The latter at once assumed a patronising air towards her elder sister, mortifying her independence in every possible way, until finally—

"Finally, here I am," said Madge dolefully, embracing in one disgusted sweep of her hands everything in the dingy little room. "And if I don't find some work very soon—I wonder if they have to wear a uniform in the workhouse—a sort of pauper dress so that nobody can mistake them for human beings—I didn't leave my address with Mabel because she didn't care about it—but Jack might have—he said——"

She began to struggle miserably with her tears. Just as she was about to throw up the sponge and have a really comfortable cry, a sudden rat-tat at the door startled her into some degree of composure.

Then Jack strode swiftly into the room. Madge sprang forward, but stopped as suddenly, and shook hands.

"Good morning, Jack," she said, in an off-hand manner, and then winked energetically in a vain attempt to recapture a tear that glittered upon the fringe of the little brown eyes. The truant having obtained his liberty tried to keep it, but at the very commencement of his explorations he fell head over heels and splashed right upon Jack's hand.

The latter, who knew something of the ways of women, discovered a sudden interest in some books that stood upon the table.

"'Landor's Imaginary Conversations,'" he said, with a long whistle of surprise; "and Potter's 'Antiquities of Greece,' Upon my word, Madge, you only need 'The Master Christian!' and your classical library's complete."

"They were left by my predecessor," said Madge. "How is Mabel?"

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It was Jack's turn to look gloomy now. "I haven't seen her for nearly six months," he said. "Do you know our engagement is at an end?"

"I had not heard," she said simply.

"Don't sympathise," he laughed. "I must admit that my vanity has suffered more than any other part of me. Indeed, I think you and I are suffering from the same cause—your step-father's money. But what have you been doing in the last six months?"

"Looking for some work to do," she said miserably. But her tone was not half so gloomy as before.

"Looking for work!" he echoed. "Why, Madge, I know of exactly the thing. Now just listen to me." He drew his chair a little nearer to her own. He dropped his bantering tone and spoke with simple earnestness. "Do you know, Madge, I'm very pleased that Mabel terminated our engagement. We were not suited to each other. And I've been rather puzzled since then, because, instead of being troubled by thoughts of Mabel, I've spent a great deal more time in wondering how somebody else was getting on. Somebody with curly brown hair and the dearest little bright eyes you ever saw——"

"You said you knew of a situation for me?" she said stubbornly, and yet afraid to look at him.

"Can't you guess what situation I meant, Madge? I want you to spend the rest of your life making me happy. That seems a very selfish way of putting it, but you've only to say 'yes' to a question I'm going to ask you and the thing's done. Will you be my wife, Madge?"

And then she managed to speak, and said "no" a hundred times over, but meant "yes" two thousand times. And she beat her little wings against the prison of happiness in which he sought to hold her.

"No, no, Jack," she cried. "It can't be! It's utterly impossible."

"Do you love me, Madge?"

Something in his eyes forced the truth from its hiding-place, away down in the warmest corner of her heart.

"Yes," she whispered. But if she had spoken it twenty times as softly he would still have heard.

"If we love each other," said Jack sturdily, and sticking to his guns like a man, "what can keep us apart?"

"I'm too poor, Jack. I'm living here in these miserable lodgings and can't find any work to do——" She took out her purse and emptied the contents upon the table. "Fifteen shillings and twopence—and a penny stamp—and there is threepence-ha'penny on the mantelpiece and—and when that's gone, Jack, I shall have to go into the workhouse, and wear a horrid grey dress with broad arrows all over."

"But, my dear girl," expostulated Jack, keeping serious with difficulty. "You will not be asked to find any money. Your place is to provide the goodness and the daintiness and the moral qualities—I'll see to the financial side——"

"A letter for you, Miss."

The landlady entered the room so swiftly and unexpectedly that they had scarcely time to lean back in their chairs and look unconcerned. She backed slowly out, eyeing them with ill-concealed curiosity. Madge tore off the envelope, and read the contents eagerly. Then she waved the letter jubilantly above her head.

"Jack!" she cried. "Listen to this. It's from a firm of lawyers in the City, and they say:

> "Dear Madam,—The senior partner of our firm recently died after a long illness, and on going through his private papers we found a will, duly executed, and bearing the signature of your step-father recently deceased. As you appear to be the sole beneficiary I shall be obliged if you can make it convenient to call here. Perhaps Wednesday next, the 21st inst., will suit you for an appointment.
>
> "I have also written to Miss Mabel Bannister, now in possession, suggesting the same day and hour.—I am, Madam, your obedient servant, John Soames."

"Isn't it splendid, Jack?" she cried. "You see the money originally belonged to mother—who was his first wife, you know, so that I have a better claim to it than Mabel has."

"Is it much?" said Jack gloomily.

"Is what much?"

"The money," still more gloomily.

"About four hundred a year."

"Then you won't want me, I suppose." He took up his hat from the table. "This is the second time that blessed money has jiggered me," he added savagely.

But Madge flew to his side in a moment.

"Jack! You dear, stupid, old fellow! You don't suppose it will make any difference, except indeed, that I can—I can say 'yes' now."

It was a most wonderful circumstance that none of Madge's ribs were broken by the energetic way in which Jack hugged her.

"But perhaps——" he said presently.

"Don't you think——" she cried simultaneously.

"After you, Madge."

"Don't you think we might allow Mabel to keep, say, two hundred a year, at any rate until she marries?"

"And if she doesn't marry," said Jack heartily. "She might have it as long as she lives."

"But, of course, after—when anything does happen to her it would revert to—to——"

"To us—to you."

"If we are alive, yes. But if not—it should go to——"

"To our heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns," quoth Jack, gravely.

* * * * *

Of all the solicitors' offices in London, that of Messrs. Thurston and Soames is undoubtedly the mustiest, the fustiest and the dustiest. From these particulars it will readily be understood by the intelligent reader that the firm in question have a very good business indeed and are exceptionally trustworthy and honest.

Jack and Madge found their way to this office on the appointed morning. Madge felt a thrill of importance as she entered the room, but was somewhat chilled by the matter-of-fact way in which the office boy motioned her and Jack to a seat.

"Miserable little wretch," she whispered indignantly to Jack.

"Positively, his legs are so short that he has to climb up to his high stool."

"He didn't seem much impressed," agreed Jack. "But perhaps he's used to beneficiaries."

The entrance of Mabel cut short the discussion. Jack and Madge rose and greeted her without a trace of bitterness, but she sniffed scornfully at seeing them together, and passing forward, requested the boy to take her card to Mr. Soames. He clambered down from his stool with some difficulty, and disappeared into the inner room, without, however, closing the door behind him.

"There's anuvver of them there come," they heard him say.

"Ask the two ladies and the gentleman to step this way," said another voice suavely. Next moment the boy reappeared at the office door.

"Yer've got to come in," he said, jerking his thumb towards the inner room.

Mabel walked in first. Jack and Madge followed humbly. Their business did not take very long to transact. Mr. Soames read the will, which was very short, and in which everything was left to Madge.

Evidently the letter to Mabel making the present appointment had not contained this information, for her face whitened and her mouth twitched in sudden passion when she heard the news.

"It is most unfair—it's abominable," she cried angrily. "I don't believe father ever made that will."

"I can assure you, Miss Bannister, that he did," said the lawyer quietly. "And, in fact, his action is merely simple justice, for the whole of the money originally belonged to his first wife, the mother of Miss Madge."

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NEXT WEEK'S NUMBER, BY THE WAY, WILL BE A SPLENDID ONE. THE COVER DEPICTS ONE OF THE MOST PATHETIC SCENES POSSIBLE TO CONCEIVE—A WOMAN DENYING HER OWN CHILD,

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Altogether, next week's number will be worth twopence in itself. But there's no need to pay twopence for it—only one penny. You get two copies for twopence—one to keep for reading, and one to make £10. . . . . . .

"I thought the matter over after reading your letter," said Madge, placing her hand affectionately on Mabel's shoulder, who, however, shook her away angrily, "and I want you, Mr. Soames, to draw up a paper making over to my sister two hundred pounds a year until she marries, and if she remains single, for as long as she lives."

"I shall carry out your instructions with great pleasure," said the old lawyer, tapping a very handsome snuff-box and then leaning over the table towards Jack: "May I have the honour, my dear sir?"

"Delighted," said Jack, looking exactly the reverse, for he loathed snuff.

In the meantime, Madge led poor Mabel—who had certainly had a very trying morning—to a chair beside the fire. But Mabel, after looking up at her with eyes full of mute entreaty, suddenly burst into tears and hid her face upon the elder girl's shoulder. Whereat the old lawyer produced a huge red silk handkerchief which he applied to his nose, a conjunction that resulted in several prodigious roars and snorts.

"Bless my soul and body!" he cried, taking Jack by the arm and dragging him bodily out of the room. "I do believe that young rascal of a boy is smashing the furniture or breaking the windows or something."

But the boy was sleeping with his head upon the hard wooden desk, and upon his dirty little face was a placid smile of immeasurable content.

Frank Wall.

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The Masked Singer

The Tale of a Strange Adventure and its Sequel.

Sydney Dalton walked aimlessly through the dingy streets of the neighbourhood into which he had unconsciously wandered after having delivered his lecture on the discoveries he had made in electrical science. It is not given to many men to make themselves famous before the completion of their twenty-seventh year, and it was undoubtedly a great triumph to have been invited to address the members of the Royal Institution at a Friday evening meeting.

That was the previous evening, and on this, Saturday night, he had left his study for a breath of air after many hours of research. When he had a difficult problem to work out, he always preferred a walk—unless, of course, actual experiment was necessary—because he could think better while walking. He had wandered on and on, not noticing whither his ungoverned feet were taking him, until he was recalled to himself by the sound of a street organ and a woman's voice. To his amazement he saw that he was in a poor district and close to a group of rough men, women and children gathered in front of a small handcart, and two persons, a man and a woman.

The woman was commencing a fresh song, the man turning the handle of the piano organ which produced the accompaniment. Rousing himself, Sydney Dalton listened with rapt attention to the singing.

It was not the song that appealed to him, it was the voice. He was a judge of musical sounds, part of his researches having been devoted to that subject, and the ring of that voice—*timbre*, musicians would have said—was altogether unusual in a street singer. The song was one of the latest musical ditties, and it earned the enthusiastic approval of the admiring crowd, that was plain enough, but Dalton half closed his eyes and gave himself up to a study of the musical tones that came pealing forth.

The song was finished, and there was a shout for another. Dalton opened his eyes to gaze at the singer, and for the first time noticed that she wore a mask.

"Strange!" he muttered. "Why did I not observe that before?"

He could not answer his own question, yet that answer was not far to seek. When a man is so thoroughly occupied with one subject, as Dalton was, his faculties are abnormally sharpened in that direction and become duller in others, so that the most noticeable things are missed unless they are directly in the line of study.

The woman responded to the call with an old-fashioned song, which, in its way, appealed to the crowd as much as the newer production had. Curbing his natural bent, Dalton gave his undivided attention to the singer and her companion. It did not take him long to discover that, notwithstanding their poor garments, the pair were of gentle birth; the man's features betrayed the fact, and the figure, bearing, and general appearance of the lady—he called her that in his mind—afforded equally incontrovertible proof of a higher social position.

"Genteel poverty!" So Sydney Dalton explained it. "Still, it is a pity to see two young, able-bodied people take up this method of earning a livelihood. They are too refined. Why do they do it? H'm! Perhaps the poor young woman has some deformity of features; hence the mask. But the man looks able enough."

The man's face showed great anxiety, which was another novel trait. Organ-grinders, as a rule, exhibit no anxiety concerning their womenkind, who can generally take care of themselves.

The accompanist appeared to be concerned at the presence of Sydney Dalton; he shot several inquiring glances at him, as the young scientist gazed fixedly at the singer, and altogether he seemed to be feeling very uneasy.

That song also came to a conclusion amid a round of applause, and the singer made a collection among the crowd, holding a little tin cup into which the appreciative might drop a copper. As she moved among the rough crowd, the man followed her movements with increased anxiety, and twice appeared to be on the point of leaving the organ in order to stand by her side. As the cup was held out to him, Sydney dropped a sixpence into it, and received a grateful "Thank you!"

"Why do yer wear that kertin over yor face?" queried a coster, who was having a few minutes' rest from attending to his stall in a street near by. His wife was doing the work.

The street singer uttered a silvery laugh, but made no reply. When she reached her companion's side, he whispered something in her ear, and they both took hold of a shaft of the cart, and began to move on, not, however, till the young woman had shot another glance at Dalton.

"Oh, I say, yer must give us another!" cried the coster, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and speaking with a show of indignation. "Yer must earn the money! If yer don't work it out, yer ought ter give it back!"

There were other cries of "Gi' us another!" The singer halted, but her companion urged her on. The public is fickle; pleasure and contentment soon turned into annoyance and dissatisfaction. An indignant chorus arose, and the coster threw half a potato, picked up from the gutter, at the departing couple. The man's face flushed hotly, and in a moment he was at the rough, and had floored him with a blow from the shoulder. Other members of the crowd surrounded the organ-grinder, who well knew how to use his hands, but Sydney was diverted from his purpose of interfering to help him by the sight of a drunken fellow strutting up to the street singer and trying to lift her mask.

In his college days Sydney Dalton had been numbered among the athletes, and, although study had rounded his shoulders a trifle, and he was out of form, he could do more than the unskilled roughs about him. He bowled the drunken fellow over with a neat hinge and, hastily whispering to the singer to pull the handcart away if she could, responded to her intreaty by going to the rescue of the man.

The two soon gave a good account of themselves, but it would certainly have gone hard with them had not someone raised the cry of "Copper coming-!" The mob dispersed with commendable celerity, but the cry must have been a ruse on the part of some well-intentioned individual, for no policeman was to be seen.

The organ-grinder seized Dalton's hand and thanked him in a few well-chosen words. The singer also expressed her gratitude briefly, but warmly, and the two hurried away with their organ.

"That was a curious adventure!" mused Dalton, as he wended his way home. "The hands of both of those street musicians were white and delicate, and I'm certain that they are not accustomed to manual labour. What does it mean? And how on earth did I come to wander so far from home? I can't walk back—too far in my tired condition. Must take a 'bus or a cab!"

Sydney Dalton could not get that voice out of his ears; it seemed to haunt him, and he tried to reproduce it with his new singing arc lamp. In the meantime he was invited here and there, and became a well-known figure in aristocratic

receptions, for the aristocracy always like to entertain men who have made, or are making, a name for themselves.

Three months passed, and Dalton found his researches somewhat hindered by attendance at this or that institution or gathering, and by invitations to fashionable parties. He was paying the penalty of greatness. He became better acquainted with the doings of Society than he had ever imagined possible; you are bound to hear rumours and gossip of all kinds when you take part in social functions and are buttonholed by two or three magnates in the course of one evening, and have to chat to ladies on various subjects. He was in danger of forgetting science and becoming a man about town.

Only a select few knew that Prince Alexander of Altenburg, who was spending the summer in England, was on the look-out for an English wife. Sydney Dalton was one of the select few, the details having been imparted to him by Lady Merton, sister of a well-known politician, to whom he had been introduced at a reception at which the Prince was present.

"The Prince is a pleasant young man," her ladyship had said, "and as you are aware" (which was not correct, but Dalton did not betray his ignorance), "he stands a very good chance of becoming the reigning Prince of one of the Balkan States. The affairs of that Principality are decidedly unsettled." She forgot that she had not mentioned the name of the State. "Well, he is anxious to have an English consort, and it is an open secret among some of us that he is here for the purpose of making a choice. You won't breathe a word, Mr. Dalton, I know! He has a fortune, so is not particular about money; but he wants a woman with certain qualifications, and I must say he is hard to please! It is most desirable that he should carry out his intention, because of the result of such an alliance when he becomes the reigning Prince. You can easily understand that a wife's influence would be great, and our Government desires to have that influence on the side of Great Britain!"

Dalton thought it would be a good thing for the British Government, but he did not care much whether the Prince married a British noblewoman or a Chinese. However, he heard more about the Prince, and at length had the honour of being introduced, for the Prince was scientifically inclined, and had heard of Dalton's remarkable discoveries.

It was about a fortnight later when Dalton made his way to the house of a nobleman just outside the Metropolis, but far enough away to be almost a country seat. This nobleman was giving a garden-party in honour of the members of an international congress that had met in London, and invitations had been sent by him to a large number of leading lights to meet the members of the congress, and so show the foreign gentlemen how British science could do them honour.

Here Dalton met the Prince, and here he met his mysterious street singer once more. A semi-formal concert was in progress in the great hall of Lyon House, and the Prince and Dalton were chatting near the entrance when the sound of a voice, singing a plaintive, old-fashioned air, made them both stop.

"A splendid voice!" remarked the Prince, his countenance lighting up with pleasure and pride.

"Yes!" rejoined Dalton absently, his mind reverting to that scene in the East-end. "Who is she? I could not find out, and, of course, I could not ask her to show her face!"

The Prince stared at Dalton, who was too deep in his recollection to observe that he was, apparently, talking nonsense.

"Science is sending him cranky!" was the inward comment of the Prince. And, finding that Dalton was still absorbed, he slipped away.

"Grand voice, isn't it?" asked Lady Merton's brother, the politician, coming up to Dalton a moment later. "I expect the Prince has left you to get near her. You know, my sister told you, that he—eh? Well, his present choice, between ourselves, is Lady Headland, and he is rather gone on her. Sings well, doesn't she? He is fond of singing. She will suit him, although she is too full of fun just yet, not stately enough. But that will soon come to her!"

"Oh, yes, certainly!" said Dalton, feeling that he must say something. But he was devoutly thankful when the politician went to talk to someone else.

Dalton entered the great hall, and stood just inside. He saw the singer, a lovely young woman, and he recognised the form. By her stood the organ grinder, turning over the music for her. Dalton's eyes were riveted on the pair; he was sure of their identity, but he could not understand.

"I was too late! I went to offer her my services." It was the Prince, with his pretty foreign accent. "What makes you look at her so, Mr. Dalton?"—rather sharply, this.

"I cannot persuade myself that I have not seen her before, Prince," replied Dalton.

"That is not surprising!" observed Prince Alexander, with just a touch of sarcasm. "She is one of the beauties of the season."

"I have seen her out of the pale of Society!" retorted Dalton nettled. "I'll swear that she is the masked street singer, and he is the organ grinder!"

At that moment the organ grinder turned with a smile from the piano, but the smile died away and a troubled look appeared on his face

"Why d'yer wear that kertin over yer face?" queried a coster from behind.

as he saw the Prince and Dalton together and looking at him with strange expressions. The change did not escape the Prince; he turned to Dalton and asked him to explain his strange words.

If Dalton had been a politician he might have scented danger; but being only an unsophisticated man of science, with mind and body steeped in electricity, so to say, he blundered on.

He told the story of his Saturday evening adventure, and told it graphically.

"And you are sure of the identity of those itinerant musicians?" queried the Prince. "Positive! Well, well! How curious! Ha, ha!"

The Prince excused himself, and Dalton, satisfied at having vindicated his sanity from the slighting reflection cast upon it by the Prince's sarcastic remark, strolled out into the spacious grounds. He was soon joined by the gentleman whom he had recognised as the organ grinder.

"We need no introduction, do we?" he remarked frankly. "I know now that you are Mr. Sydney Dalton, and perhaps you know that I am Lord Renton, cousin to Lady Headland, who was playing and singing just now—and the other Saturday! At least, she was singing then and I was playing the accompaniment, and we were both playing a part!"

The young fellow spoke lightly, jestingly, but he was troubled, and the cause was soon made apparent.

"I saw you talking to Prince Alexander inside the hall, Mr. Dalton. Did you—I hope you did not—that is, I suppose you mentioned to him that you had seen us with——"

"Yes, I did!" replied Dalton simply. "He wouldn't believe it at first, but I convinced him. I could not be mistaken in that voice. I have been trying to reproduce the *timbre*. What is the matter?" This question came in response to a groan from Lord Renton.

"I am afraid that you have spoilt a happy marriage and upset a grand diplomatic *coup*, Mr. Dalton. I was constantly in fear of disclosure. I was certain that the escapade would come to light! Well, it cannot be helped now!

"I'll tell you all about it," he continued. "There was a grand Society bazaar in support of a charity, I forget which it was. Royalties gave articles of their own making or sums of money. My cousin, being one of the season's beauties, was asked to contribute; she had no article of her own make, and her family is not well off, so she could not make such a show of giving as some of the others could. Then she said that to give money when you have a lot is not charity. Charity should cost you something. But if you have no money, you cannot give it, can you? So she declared that she would give money earned by herself, and the idea caught on. Everybody wanted to know how she intended to earn it, but she said nothing.

"She insisted that I must help her, and, as we have been more like sister and brother than cousins, I agreed. She kept the affair a secret, but a day or so later—on the Saturday, in fact—she sent a note and a bundle to me and asked me to don it, and meet her at a certain spot at half-past eight that evening. As soon as I saw the contents of the package, I guessed the truth. She intended to play the part of the street musician and I was to go with her.

"I called on her and tried to dissuade her, but she would not listen. If I did not care to go with her, she said, she would go alone, and get some fellow to drag the hand-cart. I couldn't let that happen, so I had to go. I met her, and found that she had a mask. I took her into a neighbourhood where the people have no great imagination and are accustomed to oddities; they might be rough, but they would not guess that the mask hid the face of a beauty of the season!

"I was in an awful state of anxiety all the time, fearing that some insult would be offered to her, but she was in the height of spirits. She is a bit of a tomboy, and liked the fun of the thing. She will steady down in time, of course. Well, the Prince was getting fond of her, and I am positive that she is in love with him; but I fancy it will be all off now. She knows nothing of the diplomatic side; it's a case of love. But you have told the Prince, and he is a great stickler for dignity. And I must admit that there was no dignity in that affair, although there was no harm in it. We got a good bit of cash, and handed it over, and since then our friends—and enemies—have been mad with curiosity to know how it was done. Directly I saw you at the edge of the crowd I knew that you were a gentleman, and that there was danger for her in being seen by one who might meet us again in our proper circle. Mr. Dalton, I don't wish to be rude, but I wish you had devoted yourself entirely to science instead of dividing your attention between science and Society!"

The masked singer was at the piano, and the organ grinder was turning over the music for her.

"So do I!" exclaimed Dalton heartily. "Can I do anything? Oh, here comes the Prince!"

"Ah, here you are, Lord Renton," said the Prince with feigned heartiness. "I have been looking for you to say goodbye. I have just bidden adieu to your charming cousin, whose lovely face will, I trust, never be *hidden* from the eyes of admirers. I must return at once. Adieu, my lord. Adieu, Mr. Dalton; I hope that science will not lead you astray again!"

A moment later he was gone, Lord Renton had set off in search of his cousin, and Sydney Dalton was vowing that he would eschew Society.

"A man of the world would not have made that blunder, I suppose," he said to himself. "That shows that one can learn many things even outside the laboratory!" **Geo. Day.**

Aphrodite of the Trout Stream.

A Charming Little Fishing Romance.

"My friend John Stuart Mill remarks——"

"Oh, never mind John Stuart Mill. What did he know of love?"

"As much as his nature was able to contain."

"Exactly, and Cupidon and John Stuart Mill do not go well together."

The speakers were two gentlemen standing on the bank of a pretty trout stream, on the flashing, darting waters of which through the over-arching boughs fell crimson patches of the setting sun.

The younger, a bright, handsome man of about four-and-twenty, was whipping the stream for a final bite; while the elder, near fifty, with a fine face and grizzled hair and beard, leaning against a tree, was putting up his lines.

"You asked me once," remarked the latter, "my definition of love. I'll tell you—a thing that enthrals man, debases him and sells him into slavery. A thing that renders some men idiots—others philosophers."

"And you, Walsingham, are of course of the latter," laughed the younger.

"And you, my dear Chesson, of the former, exactly."

"Thanks."

"Is it not true? You come here fishing; you catch a glimpse of a slim figure, a pretty face. From that moment you become idiotic; you declare that an angelic being has deigned to descend to prosaic earth; you rave, and for days have haunted this stream, in hopes again to see this houri—some pink-cheeked milkmaid."

"No milkmaid, my dear philosopher. But how is it, man, you never married? I will not believe you have reached nearly half a century and never loved."

"Married!" repeated the other, with an abrupt laugh, "and you have heard my opinion of love."

"Just so. Shall I tell you my definition of a philosopher? One who, having enjoyed the follies of life himself, would later instruct others under a cloak of wisdom."

Harry Chesson, laughing, strolled farther up the stream.

Matthew Walsingham looked after him thoughtfully, then drew a long breath, as he murmured:

"Perhaps he does not guess how near to the truth he is. Did I ever love?—did I?—would I could say no."

Just at that moment a cry of alarm sounded in the air. It was a young, fresh, feminine voice, and came from some little distance down stream.

Matthew Walsingham sprang erect. Harry Chesson had also turned; but the elder, in hastening in the direction had the advantage.

For a moment he could see no one, neither on the banks nor on the stones in the stream. He already had slackened his pace, when, just where the boulders formed stepping stones across, and where the eddying waters were deepest, he beheld something floating, like a portion of a woman's dress.

A few seconds brought him to the spot, when, to his horror, he beheld, lying in the bed of the stream, between the rocks, a young girl!

She was motionless, as one dead; her face, of a delicate beauty, was pale and still—her eyes closed—while the water carried her hair like threads of gold about the moss-covered boulders.

To jump down on to the boulders, raise the girl on to his shoulder, scramble out, and bearing her to the opposite bank, lay her down, was with Matthew Walsingham, the work of a very brief space. The girl gave no sign of life—she seemed as if dead.

The cause was apparent in a discolouration of the temple, which had been struck in her fall.

Perplexed, alarmed, Walsingham was kneeling, chafing the small hands, when a quick, startled cry from Chesson, who now ran up, caused him to raise his head.

"What is the matter?" he ejaculated, half irritably.

"It is she?" cried the young man, throwing himself on his knees. "Oh, Walsingham, for Heaven's sake, say she is not dead!"

"She—who?" was the sharp demand.

"She for whom I have been waiting, watching—she whom," his voice trembled and sank, "I love!"

"Pshaw!" but his tone lacked its habitual cynicism. "Far better help me to restore the poor child. It is evident she slipped on the wet moss, and in falling struck her temple. Had we not been near, she surely must have been drowned."

Harry Chesson's brain swam, his heart felt sick at the idea. Reverently he put the long, wet hair from the pale cheek; trembling, he chafed the brow, the hand he held.

Abruptly he drew back, colouring, half confused, as one detected in guilt. The girl's eyes—clear as crystal, blue as violets—had opened, and, after wonderingly regarding Walsingham, had wandered to him.

"Where am I? What has happened?" she whispered faintly.

"Pray do not be alarmed," said Walsingham—Chesson could not speak. "You slipped on the stepping-stones; that is all. We were near to help you. All is right now."

Her recollection was returning.

A vivid blush dyed her cheek.

"Ah, I remember! Thank you very much!" she murmured in confusion, trying to rise.

Walsingham aided her; Chesson stood aside. He noted her confusion, and guessed she could accept aid better from an older than a younger man. Yet how he envied his friend!

Rising to her feet, leaning against a tree, she shivered.

"You must get home at once, young lady," said Walsingham, gently. "Your dress is wet; I fear you will take cold if you remain still. Can you walk with assistance?"

"Oh, yes, I can walk even without," she replied, quickly. "I am better now," trying to press the water from her clothes. Then, fixing her eyes upon them with a glance neither forgot, she added: "I know I owe my life to you—indeed I am grateful; but—I cannot think of words now to thank you!"

"Oh, let us defer thanks until later!" laughed Walsingham, to put her at ease. "We must think of dry clothes first. I trust you do not live far away?"

"No, quite near."

"Will you try to get there? We will accompany you."

"Oh, indeed, I would not trouble you. There is no need!" she exclaimed.

But when she made an attempt to move, she had to admit there was, and accepted Harry Chesson's arm; for Walsingham, stepping back, had signed him to advance. He had even done him a greater kindness. He left him to have a *tête-à-tête*.

"I will go back and collect our fishing-tackle," he had said. "We will meet at the inn."

His friend had given him a look that said as plainly as words:

"I'll never forget this. You have made me your debtor for life!"

Then they two went along the banks among the ferns and tree-trunks; while Matthew Walsingham, re-crossing the stepping-stones, returned to where they had so hastily abandoned their rods, gathered them up, and strolled to the inn.

"If ever woman looked worthy a good man's strong love, truly she does," he reflected, as he went. "But did ever woman yet?"

It was nearly an hour before Chesson rejoined him. His step had a greater buoyancy, his eyes a clearer light; a smile was on his face.

"Well," said Walsingham, sitting in the window seat without his pipe: "'Prithee why so gay, fond lover? Prithee why so gay?'"

"You may laugh," exclaimed Harry Chesson, brightly. "Cynic as you are, you will confess that she is beautiful—worthy a life's devotion!"

Walsingham shrugged his shoulders.

"An Aphrodite, arisen—not from sea-foam, but the eddies of a trout stream."

"Nevertheless beautiful, old man. A wager — thou Diogenes—thou shalt be converted to a pleasant, kinder thought of woman and Ænone shall convert you."

Matthew Walsingham looked quickly round.

"Ænone!" he repeated. "Ye powers, what a name! So you have discovered Aphrodite?"

"Her mother called her by it. Her mother, who, hearing her daughter's story, prays you to accompany me to her cottage two hours hence, to receive her thanks, or——"

"Absurd! Or what?"

"She is so grateful, that if the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must come to the mountain."

"Not if I know it," exclaimed Walsingham starting up, "A scene in this rustic inn! A weeping, grateful parent—and, shall I add, a match-making mother."

"Say what you please. I am too content to care. Only you will come with me, Walsingham?"

"Yes, I do not mind. I'll go to take care of you, my poor friend, after brief reflection," in a serio-comic tone. "Now let's have done with the subject, Romeo, until we start. Remember I am not a lover, and need dinner."

When through the soft summer evening twilight, the two started for the cottage, Walsingham half regretted that a curiosity he would not confess had urged him to give the promise he had.

Outwardly cynical, inwardly kind, generous, he hated to be thanked. Still there was no avoiding it now.

"What is this lady's name?" he asked, abruptly.

"I do not know. How, in the joy and the alarm, could I ask it. But she *is* a lady."

"And the father?"

"She is a widow; and has been very beautiful. There is the cottage."

It was a simple thatched dwelling, rendered pretty by roses and honeysuckle, and if not absolutely bespeaking indigence, showed small signs of wealth.

"My friend," remarked Walsingham, sententiously, "when poverty looks in at the door, loves make his bow at the window. You would prove an excellent catch to Miss Ænone."

"Possibly," exclaimed Chesson, gaily, as coming under the porch, he tapped lightly at the door. It was instantly opened by the widow herself, a slim, fair-haired lady, attired in plain, dark garments.

"Oh, you have come!" she ejaculated in a soft, sweet voice. "How kind of you, gentlemen! Pray enter. My daughter is lying down; I feared the chill, so kept her in her room."

Walsingham cast a whimsical glance at his friend, whose gaiety had at once, he knew, sunk to zero, as they followed the lady into the parlour. It was plainly adorned by those little touches, and books and flowers, which speak both of refinement and taste.

On the table stood a lamp. Reaching a chair, the widow turned to bring it for her guests, when her eyes rested on the face of the elder, who stood in the full light. Harry Chesson saw her expression change to amazement, blended with terror. A cry burst from her lips, she ejaculated:

"Matthew Walsingham! Oh! Heaven be merciful to me!"

Then she dropped on the chair, her face bowed on her hands, as she heard her friend's voice, huskily tremulous:

"Laura Greenlees! Here!"

Then a hand was put on his arm, and Walsingham whispered:

"Leave us, Chesson, dear lad."

Instantly he obeyed. As he drew to the door he was aware of the widow on her knees, her hands extended, her voice full of passionate pleading as she cried:

"Oh, Matthew, hear me! Pardon—forgive!"

Harry Chesson paced the lane in view of the cottage waiting. He was surprised, bewildered. What did it all mean? Would Walsingham explain? Who was this lady—Ænone's mother? It was close upon an hour afterwards when Walsingham came out.

"You have waited," he said, and Chesson observed a change in his voice, it was softer. "Thank you! We will not go to the cottage again to-night; let us return to the inn; I have much to tell you."

He had slipped his arm into the other's, and they already were proceeding down the lane.

"You know Mrs. Greenlees?" hesitated Chesson.

"Not Greenlees now, her name is Mrs. Marsland," said Walsingham, in a low tone. "Chesson, she was the only woman I ever loved—loved as few men do. I believed my affection returned, I was accepted, our marriage day was fixed. It arrived; I was ready—all were ready, only one person was missing—the bride—Laura had fled. When I heard of her again she was wedded to Arthur Marsland!"

He paused a second, then went on.

"I must be brief; things seemed to speak for themselves. I gave her no further thought—or tried not to; and condemning Laura, condemned all her sex."

"But!" suggested Chesson, eagerly, "there has been an explanation!"

"Yes! It appears that this fellow had inveigled her when a girl into a correspondence; at one time she had believed she loved him; he, soon after her acquaintance with me, made her fear him. Her—her love for me, made her more sensitive that the foolish past should not reach my ears; she fought her persecutor to the last, until the eleventh hour—then her courage failed; she could fight no longer; she yielded to his threats, and sacrificed her happiness to save her folly being revealed. Now, dear boy, you know all. Will you go on first? I will follow."

* * * * *

Before the summer of the next year Harry Chesson and Ænone Marsland were married, the bride being given away by her step-father—Matthew Walsingham.

As the young pair were about to start on their tour, Chesson, stepping to Walsingham, while Ænone embraced her mother, whispered merrily:

"Well, Diogenes, have I won my wager?"

"You have, my son! If that philosopher never discovered an honest man, I have discovered a woman worthy of a man's love; nay, the devotion of a life!"

G. Parkyn.

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TREASURE TROVE.

The Tale of a Purse and its Owner.

"If ever I find money, I'll keep it. No advertising for the owner with me—not much!"

Many a time had Percival Langdon said this, with a careless glance down at the pavement and an odd feeling of wonder as to how it would feel were he to see a big roll of bank-notes at his feet. And now, there in his pathway, lay a pretty little purse, distinctly feminine, as unmistakably the lost property of a woman as if it had borne the name of the owner in big letters on the side.

Percival picked it up. It was a snake-skin, somewhat worn, but still dainty, and it had silver trimmings and a silver clasp. As the finder held it for a moment in his hand some strange force from the fingers accustomed to carrying it seemed to strike into his palm. It almost seemed to him as if he felt the warm weight of a little hand in his own. Who has not found this personality in a cast-off glove or shoe or other object strongly associated with its wearer? Even a cast-off relic of the dead has the touch and "feel" of the absent one long years after he or she has departed.

The young man looked up and down the street. Unconsciously his eyes sought out a short, stout figure, one befitting ownership of the little treasure trove which he had picked up. But there was no one in sight whom he could associate even remotely with the purse.

He laughed aloud.

"Well, by Jove, this is funny," he said to himself. "For years I have been wishing that I could find money and have planned how I would get rid of it if fortune ever favoured me, and the moment I really do find some, behold, I am looking for the owner. But perhaps there is no money in it to tempt me after all."

He opened it. There were a number of samples of dress goods, a recipe for making soft gingerbread ("soft gingerbread—that's good," exclaimed Percival, smacking his lips. "If there is one thing I like better than another it's soft gingerbread!") a newspaper clipping containing three verses of sentimental poetry, a glove button-hook, a five pound note, and a handful of small change.

"My, what a tidy little sum!" cried Percival. "There's a box of cigars and a new suit. All I've got to do is to toss the purse into the sewer and put the money in my pocket!"

It was only a passing thought, a flash, the echo of ideas he had often had before when that dream which comes to all of us at one time or another—the dream of "picking up money"—lingered in his fancy.

But was there nothing in the purse to mark its owner? It did not appear so. "Women are so silly," he said. "No; it is I who am silly," he added, as it suddenly came to him that there was a back pocket in the purse. He lifted the cover. Yes; there was a narrow card tucked away in it. With blundering fingers he fished it out and turned it up so that he could see the name inscribed upon it—"her name." Somehow possession of the little purse had given him a sort of proprietary interest in the owner.

It was a pretty name, very pretty. Percy caught his breath when he read it:

MABEL SWEETBRIAR,
No. 77, Larkspur Gardens.

"Mabel! I always fancied that name." For some reason he could not understand Percy raised the bit of pasteboard to his lips, remembering that her fingers had touched it. "Mabel! Short and plump, with dark hair and big brown eyes. I'll bet that's what she is. Well, bless my soul, Percival Langdon, anyone might think you were already in love with her."

A moment later Percival was walking rapidly toward Larkspur Gardens. It was a mile away and in a rather aristocratic neighbourhood. But little thought he of distance. His one desire was to find the owner of the purse and restore her property before she had a chance to suffer much over its loss. Had he been a personal friend he could not have felt more anxious about it. As he went along he kept repeating to himself, "Oh, for the touch of a vanished hand!"

The touch of a vanished hand! Did he not feel it on the polished leather?

Langdon's heart was pumping like a fire engine when he rang the door bell of a pretty little house which bore the magic number "77" in gold foil on the glass panels. He was a good-looking young bank clerk, underpaid, as all bank clerks are, but earning a decent living, and able to dress well, and, as he would say it, live like a gentleman. He had an inborn honesty for which he did not give himself credit, for he often thought, given the opportunity, that he would appropriate a fortune without a tremor. And yet the moment he was put to the test he did not have an instant's temptation.

"Short and dark—I beg a thousand pardons," stammered Percival. "You—I was saying—is this Miss Mabel Sweetbriar?"

She clapped her hands.

"Oh, you have found it! I knew you would! I told mother you—that is, the finder—would read my name upon the card and bring it home. Mamma!" She raised her voice, and Percival noticed that it was sweet and fine. "The lost is found, dear! You will be able to see that specialist after all! But you must come in, sir! Mother—and I—will want to thank you."

"Yes, Mab," said a gentle voice from a room beyond. "Bring the gentleman in. He has taken such a load off our minds! You will excuse my not rising, sir? I am an invalid."

When Percival Langdon left the house an hour later, with an invitation to call again ringing in his ears, he waited until he got round the corner, and then he kicked himself.

"Down on your knees," he said to himself, "and thank God you are not a villain! If you had taken the earnings of that poor girl, already laid upon the altar of her mother's sickness, you would have been the most unmitigated scoundrel alive.

"It makes me shudder to think of it. But you were not tempted. You were not! The 'touch of a vanished hand' was on that purse, like a talisman. And what a plump little hand it was! Just what I conceived it would be. How warm it was and magnetic! She pressed mine and told me she was sure we would be great friends. Percival Langdon. I believe you are the seventh son of a seventh son. The glimpse you got of the owner of that purse was borne out by the reality in every respect."

* * * * * * *

Six months later the plump little hand and the plump little owner thereof became the property of Mr. Percival Langdon for better or worse and all the rest of it. He is chief cashier at the bank now and has a salary not to be despised. And he will tell you, with a voice of pride and a smacking of the lips, that his wife makes the best soft gingerbread in all the world and other things just as good.

H. W. Raymond.

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Pa's Restoration.

A Move from the Kitchen to the Sitting Room.

The girls were thoroughly enjoying themselves in the sitting-room. It was well warmed and lighted, and there was a sound of laughter and the hum of merry voices. Someone was tuning a mandoline to the piano, and there was a fluttering of music leaves. Some friends had come in, as usual, to spend the evening. The Moberly girls, that is, the three older ones, all had light hair, blue eyes, and lively, vivacious manners that proved very attractive to the young people in the quiet village.

"Pa" Moberly nobody knew much about. He usually sat out in the kitchen during the evening. It was a dingy little room, and often he had no light; only the dull glow of the stove and the red sparks of his old-fashioned pipe.

Pa Moberly was a little, timid, shrinking man. He had faded blue eyes, bent shoulders and toil-worn hands. He had worked hard for his girls. He had ungrudgingly given them his best. It seemed too bad that now he was old and they were grown to womanhood they did not care.

When Mrs. Moberly was alive, however, things were different. He had his comfortable easy chair then in the sitting-room; his slippers, too, and there was the sofa to rest on when he was tired.

But as his girls grew up, pretty, strong-willed and altogether selfish, Pa Moberly found himself banished from his comfortable quarters. A number of cushions too fine for use adorned the old sofa, and his armchair was bedecked with a gaudy antimacassar. He was soon made to understand that he was not wanted.

It was therefore not long before he began to stay in the kitchen, and by and by he sat nowhere else. He knew every figure on the dingy papered walls, and the only chair he had to sit in was a straight-backed wooden one, in which he could not rest.

He used to long sometimes for his old corner in the sitting-room, with its lights, its laughter, and its music, but to his gentle hints the girls gave scant encouragement. "They didn't want pa there," they told themselves.

The lonely, tired old man had many thoughts as he sat in the kitchen night after night in solitude, and he used sometimes to ponder the question in his gentle heart as to whether, after all, it paid to bring up girls who were ashamed of you when you were old.

Polly, his youngest, did not know about the changed condition of affairs. She was more like her mother than any of the others, being small, quiet, and brown-eyed.

She had been staying for three years in Scotland with an invalid aunt, after whom she had been named. Poor Aunt Bassett was dead now, and to-day Polly had come home again. She was upstairs, busy in the small back room that the girls had forgotten to make ready for her.

As Pa Moberly sat alone in the kitchen to-night he was thinking of Polly. In his yearning, fatherly heart there was a faint stirring of hope.

There was a chance that he might take some comfort with this, his youngest daughter. He had felt that from the time she was born. She wasn't like the other girls, and she had seemed so unfeignedly glad to see him. He still felt the pressure of her young arms about his neck, and her kisses lay warm upon his furrowed cheek.

In the darkness of the old kitchen he brushed a tear from his eye. He was thinking of Ma Moberly, too, and of her gentle, tender, womanly ways. He wished the girls were more like their mother.

Just then Polly came in. She went quickly to his side.

"Why, pa," she cried, "what are you sitting in the kitchen for, and in the dark, too? Is anything the matter?"

In the friendly darkness Pa Moberly took the little hand and stroked it. "Nothing, Polly," he said. "I—I always sit here."

Polly seated herself on his knee. "Always sit here?" she cried, in surprise. "Don't you go into the sitting-room in the evenings as you used to?"

Pa Moberly shook his head. "No," he faltered.

"But why?" insisted Polly. "You don't mean to tell me you don't sit in your old chair any more?"

Pa Moberly's chin quivered. Polly did not know, and it was hard to tell her. Polly was like her mother.

"Alice likes to keep that chair for her friends," he said, slowly. "Oh, I don't mind the kitchen so much, dear," he added, as cheerfully as he could. "At least I won't now, since you've come home. I do miss the old chair rather, but it's all right.

"The girls don't want me in there, Polly," he went on, huskily. "They're young, and there's always company, you know. I don't know that I blame 'em much. I'm old and worn out and behind the times. No, I can't say that I really blame 'em."

Polly laid her soft cheek suddenly against the wrinkled one.

"You're not old or worn out or behind the times, either!" she said. "It's a shame for you to stay out here!" Her sweet, girlish voice was full of indignation.

"But never mind, pa," she went on. "I tell you there are better days ahead. I've come home now, and I'm going to look after you, see if I don't. What would mother think if she were here, to see you sitting all alone in this dark old kitchen? Why, it would break her heart! Come with me, pa!"

"Where?" said Pa Moberly, hesitatingly, in his surprise.

"Into the sitting-room."

"Oh, I can't go in there, Polly; they don't want me."

"Yes, you can. I want you. You wouldn't refuse me anything on this, my first night home?"

Pa Moberly got up. The old wooden chair was uncomfortable, and he rose stiffly even with the help of Polly's arm.

"No, I couldn't, Polly," he said. "You—you're too like your mother."

As they left the dark kitchen together Pa Moberly grasped Polly's hand tightly. "I'm afraid, Polly," he whispered. "We'd better not."

But Polly only squeezed his hand in a reassuring clasp, and somehow Pa Moberly felt stronger.

Polly opened the sitting-room door, and a stream of light flashed out into the dark little entry. The girls were certainly having a merry evening.

A young lady in a blue dress occupied the piano stool. A young man, with his hair plastered down over his forehead, occupied Pa Moberly's armchair. He had a mandoline in his hand, and was strumming it to the young lady's accompaniment. Alice and Belle and Harriet were sitting about with the liveliest air of enjoyment.

As Polly and Pa Moberly entered, their complacency suddenly faded into astonishment and dismay. What did Polly

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mean, and what did pa mean, by intruding on their company in this fashion?

Polly advanced steadily into the centre of the room, still holding her father's hand.

How little and shy and bent pa looked, the girls thought, and how determined was the air Polly wore—like a young captain going into battle. It was as if Ma Moberly had come to life.

Alice rose. The young lady at the piano turned, the young man stopped his mandoline. In all the months he had come to the Moberly house, this was the first time he had ever seen the little, white-haired man who lived there. And who was that pretty brown-haired girl with flashing eyes?

Alice broke the silence. "My sister Polly, Mr. Bryant," she said, a little nervously, "and—my father. And this is our friend, Eva Brent. Pa, you know Eva?"

Pa nodded cordially; so did Polly. But something wholly unusual was in the air, and everyone felt it.

Polly led Pa Moberly up to the young man reclining in the chair. "Do you mind taking another chair, Mr. Bryant?" she said, pleasantly. "You see, this one is father's favourite. Mother gave it to him."

Alice and Belle and Harriet flushed, but Polly was quite undisturbed. The young man was astonished, but he rose quickly, with a stammered apology, and Polly calmly wheeled the chair nearer the pleasant fire.

"Sit here, father," she said, affectionately, "and let me turn the light so that it won't hurt your eyes."

She adjusted the light to her liking, then pushed Pa Moberly gently into his old place. His white air shone in the lamplight, and his lips trembled.

"There!" said Polly, in a pleased voice. "Isn't that better?"

Regardless of all onlookers, she stooped and kissed the withered cheek; then she turned to the others.

"Go on with your playing, won't you, Eva?" she said, gently.

Nobody spoke; then the young lady turned to the piano and the restraint was quickly over.

Pa Moberly's eyes grew moist. How soft the chair was, and how pleasant the fire, and how comfortable was the touch of the little firm hand upon his shoulder!

And there was something else. He knew and everyone else knew that his lonely hours in the old kitchen were over.

To-morrow the straight-backed wooden chair would be pushed back, to be occupied no more. The firelight could play on the dingy walls, the mice could scamper at will over the old floor. Pa Moberly would not be there to see. Polly had come home to take care of him, and Polly was brave. It was as if Ma Moberly had come to life again.

S. H. Martin.

Fate Again.

Brown: "I'm glad I met your wife. She seemed to take a fancy to me." Jones: "I wish you'd met her sooner."

The Difference.

Young maids sit—ah, happy chaps—young maids sit on young men's laps. Old maids sit—when past their primes—old maids sit in the lapse of time.

Spoilt by Money.

Jack: "Many a happy marriage has been spoilt by money." Tom: "Yes, it spoilt mine. She refused me because I didn't have enough."

Had Stopped Fights Before.

Passer-by: "Policeman, there's a fight round the corner." Policeman: "Thank ye, sir; I'll do as much for you some day." (And he walked in the opposite direction.)

His Very Reason.

She: "I do not care to marry you. I do not even care to talk to you." He (a widower): "That is precisely the reason why I want you to marry me."

Your Editor Chats.

You will probably remember that a week or so ago I stated in this column that I had a big scheme on hand, the object of which was to secure more readers for this paper and at the same time to give you an opportunity, unexampled for its simplicity, of making money—not merely by shillings but by pounds, not for yourself only but also for your friends. Well, this scheme is now prepared, and you will find the preliminary announcement of it on page 7. I want you to read this notice through carefully, then you will have time to prepare your friends, and they to prepare their friends, and so on for what is coming next week. In this way you stand a better chance of coming in first with ten solid sovereigns jingling in your own pockets, and a number of your friend's friends possessing single sovereigns for the little trouble they took in trying to help you. I am certain that the scheme will be a success, and the more sovereigns we have to give away the better we shall be pleased.

I have received a very interesting letter from a correspondent who is immensely delighted with the "Confessions of Cynthia," and wants me to disclose Miss Cynthia's real name. But no, I really mustn't do that. I'm afraid Miss Cynthia might have something to say to me were I to do so, for the very fact that her own real name and the other names in the confessions are screened from the public, has alone enabled us to publish the exposure. By the way, there is a very startling development in next Tuesday's instalment. Things are beginning to look decidedly black for Mrs. Norton.

I wanted to have published the result of the "Design" competition this week, but owing to the number sent in this is impossible. I hope to give the names of the prize-winners next Tuesday, and to reproduce some of the best efforts, which, judging from those I have up to the present seen, are really remarkable exhibitions of skill.

For This Week's Competition I am offering a **Handsome Solid Silver Pencil-case** to the reader who sends me the most sensible sentence constructed out of twelve words, the first letters of which, taken in order, spell "Short Stories." The ten competitors whose efforts come next will receive prizes of pretty little **Rolled Gold Hearts** and **Rolled Gold Charms.** Sentences should be written on the back of post-cards only, should be marked "Word," and addressed to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C. The competition closes after the first post on Tuesday morning, July 8th.

Your Editor.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE	Pettigrew's secretary.

Mrs. Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia: Her companion.

MY COUSIN RECEIVES A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

CYNTHIA tells in the opening chapter of her arrival at her cousin's in the capacity of companion, and of her discovery that Mrs. Norton is taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money are being lost and won. The climax is reached one night when Mary Vernon stakes her diamond ear-rings (a gift from Lord Kinross) and one of the onlookers finds them to be paste. Mary Vernon declares that they are exactly as given to her by Lord Kinross, whereupon Kinross breaks off the engagement. The diamonds subsequently appear as a gift from Fluffy to Mrs. Norton, set in a pair of hat-pins. A few weeks later the notorious Mrs. Norton, with Fluffy's help, succeeds in stealing a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew at the Café Regal, by substituting for the millionaire's pocket-book one exactly like it. Later on Cynthia discovers the original pocket-book, empty of course, in one of her boxes. Not knowing what to do, she confides in Fluffy, who is very kind, but makes her promise to say nothing at all to anyone else on the subject. He takes charge of the duplicate pocket book. Mrs. Norton now moves into her new house in Pont Street.

THE next morning—our first in Pont Street—was a miserable one. Outside the day was gloomy, within it was not much better, for Frances, her amiability of the night before vanished, found fault impartially with everything and everybody. I endeavoured to dodge the domestic thunder-cloud and slipped into the library—Frankie had a lot of decent books—in the hope of a good read.

Not long was I left undisturbed.

"So you're here," Frances remarked angrily. "You are never to be found when you're wanted. Bring your books into the drawing-room, or, better still, get some work. I'm expecting somebody to call, and I wish you to be present."

Obediently I followed her, and sat and stitched till lunch-time, Frances sitting moodily by the fire, or pacing up and down the room with a swift, noiseless movement that reminded me of a feline creature in captivity.

She was never more fascinating than at such moments. Her long, graceful limbs outlined by the clinging skirt, her head thrown back in a defiant pose, eyes veiled with thought that yet revealed the smouldering fires of passion, lips red and ripe half parted showed the snowy white teeth.

"A dangerous woman," the old dowager had called her—something of what that meant, watching, I understood.

Lunch over, we changed our dresses, Frankie looking splendid in a tea-gown of daffodil satin with ruffles of Mechlin lace, while I was quite passable in a grey cloth gown with turquoise buttons.

Returning to the drawing-room, we sat and waited, hearing three, then four o'clock strike in silence. At last there came a ring at the front door, Frances leant forward, a scarlet flush in her cheek.

"Mrs. Norton?" It was Sir John's voice full of pleasurable anticipation.

I did not hear the maid's reply, but a few moments later the door shut and Sir John passed down the steps. I caught a glimpse of him as he went through the gate; he was wearing a frock coat suit of grey with a buttonhole of violets, and looked distinguished, but, I thought, tired and disappointed. I felt sorry for him, and vexed with Frances.

The next arrival was poor Fluffy, he also was sent empty away; with him an over-dressed young man, who bore a family likeness to the pink-faced youth I met at Lady Winchin's.

At five we had tea—Frankie stealthily watching the clock. I think she had given up hope of her visitor for that day, when a hansom stopped outside our door.

"It's Lord Kinross," I said quietly, and gathering up my work, prepared to leave the room.

"Sit down, sit down," cried Frankie; "I have something

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important to tell you. You remember Lady Westall, that horrid old woman we met at the races, and you remember also how she was pulling some woman's character to pieces the whole afternoon?"

"Yes, she was talking most of the time to Kinross. I was sorry for the poor woman she was speaking of, she said such nasty things."

"I am glad you remember. Lady Westall said the woman was an adventuress, with neither money, position, nor friends. I was the woman she referred to, Cynthia. I, your cousin!"

"Impossible, Frankie!"

"I tell you I caught my name. Besides, since that afternoon, Kinross has been different to me. He only called once at the Cecil afterwards, and was quite changed when I met him out."

"He can't believe that horrid Lady Westall?"

"What she said has had an effect upon him. He likes me, but has his suspicions all the same. Perhaps he thinks I want to entrap him into marriage—adventuresses always do that sort of thing, you know. Anyway, I am going to nip his suspicions in the bud. He shall hear from me this afternoon the history of my life—my girlhood, my marriage, who I am, where I come from, what I live on. I will tell him and he shall believe me."

Barely had she finished speaking when Lord Kinross was announced. I did not like his manner towards Frankie; usually I considered him a very charming person, that afternoon he struck me as being a touch too free and easy, familiar, almost wanting in respect.

Frankie seemed to feel the change; she was quite dignified, not to say stately in her greeting.

"You have worked a transformation here, Frankie," Kinross remarked, glancing round the room; "it's first-rate. Mrs. Ponsonby would not recognise her dingy apartment."

"I am so glad you like it," answered Frankie. "You are so terribly critical, I was afraid of your judgment."

"Never fear my judgment where you are concerned," he answered with an expressive look.

"Does that apply only to taste in furniture?"

"It covers everything."

"Do you know, I have been told you can be terribly severe, Lord Kinross?"

"An enemy's detraction—no more, Mrs. Norton. There's only one thing I can't forgive in man or woman"—he had grown suddenly grave, and spoke quite earnestly—"and that is deliberate deception. Anything else I would overlook—in you," he added flippantly.

"I wonder," she said with a laugh, "I wonder."

"Try me," he said, and came quite close, touching her with his hand.

Frankie did not respond to his advances.

"I thank your lordship," she said lightly, "and if at any time I feel disposed to forge your name, or steal your family jewels, I shall claim forgiveness."

"You may have the jewels without stealing 'em—under conditions," he said impudently.

"So? Then I'll borrow them some day. Say, when I am 'presented.'"

"Who's going to perform that office for you, Frankie—the invaluable Mrs. Ponsonby?"

"No, not Mrs. Ponsonby." Frances spoke in a deliberate fashion. "My late husband's cousin, Lady Gaveston, has expressed a wish that I should appear at Court under her wing. Otherwise my dear friend Lady Winchin would have presented me."

"Your late husband's cousin, Lady Gaveston," he repeated the phrase with unction—"is possibly the widow of the Scotch baronet, Sir Travers of that ilk?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"By reputation. I believe she is a good woman of the deepest dye—godly, sober, and righteous beyond endurance. You'll have to alter, Frankie, to find favour in her sight."

"My list of acquaintances—yes," she said with meaning.

"You needn't—Sir John will atone for a multitude of—Fluffies."

Frances flushed to her temples.

"One certainly cannot accuse Sir John of bad taste," she said pointedly.

Lord Kinross refused to accept the snub.

"He has the advantages of your tuition. One cannot help envying Sir John his opportunities. While as for Fluffy's—"

My cousin did not reply immediately.

"Poor Fluffy," she said at last with a half sigh, "and yet I don't know why I should call him 'poor.' There's a great deal to respect, indeed to admire in him. I, at least, cannot forget how good a friend he's been to me. There aren't many men who'd give up the time and thought to another's business that he has done to mine. My husband died very suddenly, Lord Kinross, leaving his affairs in a most complicated state, but for Fluffy's skill and patience in disentangling them I should be very differently placed at this present moment."

"Your husband's not been dead very long, Mrs. Norton?"

"Two years. He was a coffee planter in Jamaica. Fluffy was over there on business some six months before Mr. Norton's death. My husband and he took a great liking for each other."

"I suppose business fluctuates in Jamaica the same as in England," observed Lord Kinross flippantly.

"It does," Frances replied gravely. "My husband had been in treaty with several firms for the purchase of his estate, but nothing had been settled. At his death I found myself at a loss how best to act. None of the offers for the estate appeared to me good enough, and yet I was afraid to refuse them all."

"Fluffy, however, like a good angel, or a novelette, appeared in the nick of time and paid a thumping price. Eh, Mrs. Norton?"

"Nothing so melodramatic. He determined to form a company to take over the land at its proper value. The company through him was floated and the estate purchased. As a result I am richer by some thousands a year."

Lord Kinross bowed. "I congratulate you, Mrs. Norton, on your income and your friend. I wish I had one as serviceable."

"Oh, you're not likely to want friends," she answered. "You'll have plenty. Why not? Cynthia and I are different. Two forlorn orphans aren't likely to make many friends." She glanced at me and laughed. Then grew serious again.

"It's easy to smile now," she said, "but it was a different matter years ago, when we hadn't kith or kin in the whole world except each other. We were brought up from childhood in a convent school, and though the sisters were good to us, still it wasn't like being at home. I stayed till I was nineteen, and left to be married. Cynthia remained till she came to me."

"And did you meet the coffee planter at the convent?" His lordship's manner was serious, but there was a suspicious twinkle in his eyes. He seemed secretly amused, as if he suspected Frankie was not telling him the truth.

"Mr. Norton was a college chum of my father's," returned Frances. "He took the opportunity of a trip to Europe to come and see his old friend's little girl. And," she stopped, a sad look crept into her eyes, "he married me," she finished with a sigh.

Frankie's description somehow gave one the impression that her marriage had not been a success. Remembering Mr. Norton's kindly face and cheery ways I felt puzzled. Any woman, I thought, might have been proud and happy in his love.

"You must have missed your cousin terribly, Miss Hamilton?" said his lordship turning suddenly to me.

There was a keen look on his face, but a smile twitched at the corners of his mouth. The question took me by surprise. As a matter of fact, I had not felt my cousin's loss acutely.

"Yes," I said vaguely. "Yes."

"Poor little girl," said Frances tenderly, "how unhappy she was about my marriage. How she clung to me that last morning when I left; I could not say 'Good-bye' for tears. Do you remember my going, Cynthia?"

I remembered the occasion distinctly, but, oddly enough,

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"CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA."
New Series of Stories.

my recollections did not correspond with Frankie's. My cousin, far from being overcome, had waved a cool "Good-bye" from the top of the coach, to which I had replied by one as calm from the convent window. Our mutual regrets were anything but keen.

"We used to lie awake at nights picturing our future—Cynthia and I. We imagined most brilliant prospects, and presented each other with the best of fortunes. But we always agreed to share our luck—if ever we had any, just as we shared our childish griefs and sorrow. Eh, dearie?" and she smiled at me.

She pinched my cheek playfully—but a little hard—when I made no answer. Somehow the right one would not come. I knew what I was wanted, what, indeed, I ought to say. Frances had been very generous to me since I became her companion, and it was only right I should acknowledge it. A vivid though unseasonable recollection obtruded itself and held me dumb. I remembered as a child at the convent, creeping to Frances in the night time, crying in the inconsistent and overwhelming fashion of childhood for my mother and my home. And Frances—well, she had not been quite kind.

My cheeks burnt under my cousin's reproachful gaze, but my heart was foolishly hot at the thought of the little crying child, and I sat silent.

And then Frances did a strange thing. She put her arm about my waist and bent over me caressingly, love and tenderness shining in her eyes.

"Cynthia," she said softly, "my dear little Cynthia, don't cry."

The words, the action, the soft touch of her fingers on my hair thrilled me. My cousin was a fascinating woman, and I a young girl, hungry for affection. The tears that had gathered in my eyes suddenly overflowed. I caught hold of her hand and held it tightly.

"Oh, Frankie, you are very, very good to me," I cried, and meant it every word.

Then fumbling for my handkerchief I made towards the door. Lord Kinross crossed quickly to where my cousin stood, his face was grave, and his manner quite abashed.

"Well?" she asked, throwing her head back, "well?" There was a note of challenge in her voice which Kinross answered.

He took her hands in his. "I offer my sincere apologies," he said. "I am convinced that Fluffy is a friend greatly to be desired, and I believe—whatever you choose to tell me," and stooping, he kissed her fingers. Frankie had triumphed, Kinross believed in her implicity.

I felt happier that evening than I had done—well, since the night Percival sent me the roses. It was so nice of Frances to show that she really cared for me. People didn't often show their feelings in the smart set. Nice of her also to have championed Fluffy, though he hardly seemed to call for such earnestness as she'd displayed. Frances did not allude to what had passed, to me, that is to say. She told Fluffy, who dropped in during the evening that his lordship had been "cheeky."

"That cat Lady Westall has been talking to him about me," she said viciously, "and other tabbies too, I expect. Lord, how I hate 'em all!" and she glared at her handsome face reflected in the glass as though for a moment she saw "the cat" referred to.

"Anything serious?" queried Fluffy. "I mean were you much annoyed?"

Frankie shrugged her shoulders.

"I've made it all right for the present," she said, "but—Jamaica's a nasty climate for reputations," she observed oracularly.

Sir John called early next morning, and left a beautiful basket of white lilac. Some half hour later Lord Kinross arrived with a suitable offering of violets and lilies. Frankie saw neither of them, but sent me down with a sweet message for each.

"Won't she see me, really, Cynthia? Not for a minute," pleaded Kinross.

I shook my head.

"Where is she?"

"In the morning-room, writing letters."

"Take me to her, like a good child."

"Certainly not. I'm afraid you're very forward, Lord Kinross."

"I'm certain you're very pretty, Cynthia. That's a sweet thing in gowns. As I can't see Frankie, I think I'll talk to you."

"You are extremely impertinent," I said indignantly.

"You are entirely charming. Look always thus, Cynthia, it is most becoming."

He gazed at me pensively, until I was obliged to laugh. It was no good to get angry with such an absurd person, and yet he irritated me, as he lounged gracefully against the mantelpiece, in a dark blue suit, with a buttonhole of lilies and a lovely thing in ties, I was obliged to own him charming. I studied his face intently—was he really the trifler he always appeared, or did this lightness of speech and manner merely serve as a cloak for sincerity? Had he, I wondered, a genuine affection for my cousin, or was he only playing, flirting with the most fascinating woman in London, as somebody called Frankie.

Sir John's straight figure and proud, set face came into my mind. How eagerly he had glanced up as I came into the room that morning, the brightness fading as he saw that yet again he was to be disappointed. No possibility of mistake there. He loved my cousin with the force of a strong, reserved nature, and so great as his love would be his suffering if—I did not care to continue that chain of thought, but returned to the consideration of his lordship.

I hoped that Frankie did not care for him; he was not, I thought angrily, capable of feeling deeply. I remembered poor Mary Vernon, and decided that had he truly loved her, he would have trusted and believed in her against all proof. I say that I decided this and approved of my decision—until I remembered Percival Hope and Mr. Pettigrew's pocket book, and grew troubled. But after all, that was quite different, Percival was nothing to me. A mere acquaintance, that was all. I sighed, and looking up, encountered Kinross' eyes.

"Well," he said, with a tolerant smile, "and what is your opinion? Am I a very worthless person, Cynthia?"

"I can't tell," I answered.

"Is my appearance so desperately deceitful? We are not all like your friend Sir John, who bears his character upon his face."

"Sir John is worth a hundred of—of other people," I concluded lamely.

"No, Cynthia, not of other people, but of me. You can afford to be candid, dear child, while your looks last."

"I did not mean to be rude," I said stiffly.

"Nor were you. Only delightfully ingenuous. Still the world isn't made up of men like me and Sir John. There are a few other types besides; and there always remains—Percival Hope." His lordship smiled maliciously, and took his leave.

Frances did not show any great enthusiasm for her flowers. I took them up for her, and was a little disappointed at her cool reception of the gifts—Sir John's at all events.

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"He is very fond of you, Frankie," I said timidly, sniffing the lilac.

Frances looked up quickly.

"Fond of me," she repeated, "do you think so?" She seemed quite interested, and left off writing.

"His face changes at your name, and when he looks at you!—you do care for him a little, Frankie?"

Frankie laughed.

"Yes—a little," she said.

"I like Sir John so much," I continued, eager on his behalf.

"Sir John," she repeated. Then as her eyes fell on the basket of lilac she frowned, looking positively angry.

"You talk a lot of nonsense, Cynthia," she said. "Put the flowers in water and run away, I'm busy."

Frances was certainly most variable.

For the first week we did not have many callers in Pont Street. Mrs. Curtis-Blunt looked us up, accompanied by a man in glasses, so also did the pink youth. Percival Hope left cards, Sir John and Lord Kinross came regularly of an afternoon. Others than these, however, did not appear. Frances, indeed, kept very quiet. She went to the theatre but little, and gave up dining at restaurants altogether.

"I'm saving myself for Lady Gaveston," she told Lord Kinross. "Her ladyship arrives next week, I'm to be presented the week after. Until then I'm leading a retired life. After——" she laughed.

"What are your 'At Home' days?" he asked.

"The first and third Wednesdays in the month. Will you promise to turn up?"

"I shall be charmed. My sister Paula is anxious to know you, with your permission I will bring her."

"I should like to meet your sister above everything," said Frances, a pink flush on her cheek.

"That's very good of you. Say, Frankie, are you doing anything to-night?"

"Yes, entertaining Sir John."

"I was going to ask you for an invitation to dinner, but in face of Sir John—Good-bye, Frankie. I'll look you up next week. My love to Lady Gaveston."

Sir John was very silent that evening, but seemed to me more in love than ever. Frankie in a white chiffon gown looked girlish and dainty, and wore some of his flowers—he sent them daily.

"I like your dress," he said gravely, "it is so simple. A beautiful jewel does not require a rich setting."

"A charming compliment, Sir John and a pretty simile. I'm afraid it won't hold good in life though. A woman may be fair as Venus, it won't prevent her being overlooked if she wears a last year's frock."

"Is happiness dependent on a constant publicity?" he asked.

"That depends on one's notion of happiness I suppose."

"But you, could you not content yourself with a life of quiet interests and pursuits if—" he paused, "if shared with one you loved?"

Frances did not reply but drew out her cigarette case, a dainty toy in silver set with turquoises, and extracted a cigarette.

"A special brand—will you have one?" she asked Sir John. "They are worth trying."

She leant back in her low cushioned chair blowing dainty wreaths of smoke.

"You're an inveterate smoker, Sir John," she remarked, handing him a fresh cigarette. "Tell me, could you content yourself with an inferior tobacco and a wretched pipe, knowing better could be had—for the asking?"

He leant forward, a pained expression on his face.

"I don't pretend to misunderstand you. But—doesn't love count at all?" he said in a low, strained voice.

"Love?" repeated Frankie scornfully, rising from her seat. "Would any man who truly loves a woman ask her to give up—this—" and she glanced round the room rich with soft silken hangings, rare flowers and costly ornaments. "When I marry I lose it all—all," she repeated. "What is offered in exchange?"

She stood before him her face glowing, her eyes flashing, an embodiment of youth and power.

He came quite close and put his hands upon her shoulders.

"Nothing but two strong hands to work for you, two arms to shelter you, a heart to love you always," he said. "I have but little money as you know."

"You can make as much as you desire—if you really cared for me."

"How? Only tell me and I'll do it. Only promise you will give me my reward, and I will not shrink from hardship, labour or anxiety."

"'Tis nothing so dreadful," she returned. "A man of your abilities could make thousands to-morrow—in the City."

"The City?" he repeated. "I do not understand. I—" he paused. "I fear I am a little dull. Will you explain?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Fluffy will do that," she said. "You'd better see him in the morning. He's always a hundred and one things on foot. He's just going to bring out a company. He might nominate you as director."

Sir John fell back.

"That," he said, "would be impossible. I know nothing of company work, and could not lend my name to an undertaking which I did not understand."

"You'll understand it all right. If not, well there's no harm in seeing Fluffy."

"I cannot——" he commenced but went no further.

Frankie had thrown herself into his arms.

"For my sake, John," she said, "for the sake of the woman who loves you. I cannot give you up, and yet I can't bear poverty. John!"

His arms about her, her fair head on his shoulder, her lips close to his own, what could he say? Was not she who asked him the woman he loved, the woman he'd dreamt might love him in return?

I went quietly from the room, but as I closed the door I heard his answer.

"For your sake, dearest, yes," he said.

And then he sighed.

And I, stealing softly through the darkened hall sighed also. I could not understand my cousin, and for the first time I doubted her. I did not believe she wanted Sir John to become a company director in order that he might make money for himself.

What then was her object? Like a flash the answer came.

To make money for herself and Fluffy!

Sir John's was a well known, indeed a famous name, many persons would take shares in a company of which he was a director, his name would stand as guarantee for any concern, and would induce hundreds to subscribe. So much the better if the concern were genuine, but, I remembered hearing someone say that certain of Fluffy's ventures were neither sound nor square. It might be that Sir John, in all ignorance, would lend his name to a company of this description, and thus induce people to risk their money, it might be their only savings.

I put the thought from me, but, try as I would, I still felt sad and ill at ease. Alas! All that I feared and dreaded for Sir John, fell short, far short of what the future brought him!

[Another dramatic incident in this powerful series is dealt with in next Tuesday's SHORT STORIES.]

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Fish Stories.

WATSON: "What was the largest trout you ever caught, James?" James: "Let's see; what day of the week is this, Watson?" "Monday, I believe. What in the world has that to do with my question?" "Oh, nothing; only I think you'd better wait until Wednesday. I always like to get as far as possible from Sunday when I tell about my fishing experiences."

Dark Corners Preferred.

"LOVE is blind," and that is why he always seeks the seclusion of the darkest corners in preference to the painful light of the front parlour.

Evidently weren't Thirsty.

LADY JANE: "Have you given the gold-fish fresh water, Janet?" Janet: "No, mum. They ain't finished the water I give 'em t'other week yet."

Friend for Mutual Convenience.

"I SEE Miss Sanders and Miss Smiley are nearly always together. What dear friends they must be!" "Not at all. You see each of them has an unmarried brother."

Terrible Trouble.

MRS. HOLDOVER: "You are in trouble, dear. Let me sympathise with you." Miss Justout: "You can't possibly, dear. I have had three proposals, and must choose between them."

Effective.

THE lady occupied a seat in the carriage alone. The man looked in, and with a smile and a bow inquired: "Engaged?" "No, married," she responded, and he backed off.

The Candid Friend.

TOM (a dejected suitor): "I congratulate you, Miss Flurt, on your approaching marriage with Mr. Brown." Miss Flurt: "Why do you congratulate me?" Tom: "Well, I can't honestly congratulate him."

Needs to be Strong.

HOUSEKEEPER: "I don't see why a big able-bodied man like you should be begging for a living." Tramp: "To tell ye the truth, mum, folks is becomin' so hard-hearted that a gent has got ter be big an' able-bodied to beg without gettin' hurt."

A Narrow Escape.

YOUNG LADY: "I suppose you have had some narrow escapes, Lieutenant Dashaway?" Lieutenant Dashaway: "Y-a-a-s. Awfully narrow escape once, bah Jove!" Young Lady (breathlessly): "In what way?" Lieutenant Dashaway: "Vewy near ordahed on active service, don'cher know; but the war came to an end before we embarked."

Drew it at the Bill.

"I SUPPOSE, doctor, that a large proportion of the ills of your patients are imaginary?" "Yes, sir, quite a large proportion." "And your treatment of such cases, I suppose, is by imaginary pills?" "Well, I suppose you might call it that." "Then, of course, for treating imaginary ills with imaginary pills, you send in imaginary bills?" "Oh, my dear sir, nothing of the kind. There's nothing imaginary about the bills; I have to draw the line somewhere."

He Didn't Ask Pa.

HE (seriously): "Do you think your father would object to my marrying you?" She: "I don't know; if he's anything like me he would."

No Alternative.

SHE: "I am simply tired of your conduct. I wonder how a woman can ever marry a man." He: "Well, there's really nothing else to marry, is there?"

Righteous Indignation.

THE BRIDE: "Kiss me again, dear!" The Groom: "But Madge, I have done nothing but kiss you for the last three hours." The Bride (bursting into tears): "Traitor, you love another!"

A Combined Effort.

CHAPPIE: "I believe there is something in this thought twansfewence notion. Vewy often I notice that Cholly and I have the same idea at once." Miss Flyppe: "Perhaps it requires your united efforts to really entertain an idea."

Absolute Certainty.

CORONER: "You seem to be certain that the deceased accidentally fell into the water. How do you know that this is not a case of suicide?" Witness: "He was a brither Scot, and had a wee bottle o' whisky on him wi' ne'er a nip ta'en oot."

Satisfactorily Explained.

"HENRY," she whispered, as though fearful of the worst, "do you love me less than a fortnight ago when you brought me some flowers or sweets every night?" "No, Evelina, no," he answered, "but pay day is yet a week off, and I generally get broke about the middle of the month."

A Bitter Pill.

HIS SECRETARY (hopefully): "Sir, I have married your daughter." (After a pause, bitterly): "I suppose you have no further use for me?" Himself: "Your week is not up until six o'clock. You may sit down and draw a new will for me, leaving all my property to the Church."

Nobody Minded.

"Do you think your sister likes to have me come here, Johnny?" "You bet. You take her to the theatre and bring her chocolates." "I'm glad I can make her happy." "Yes, and the young feller what she's engaged to don't mind it either, for it saves him that much money towards housekeeping."

Resembling Feature.

THE addresses of a young man having been declined by a young lady, he paid court to her sister. "How much you resemble your sister," said he, the evening of his first call. "You have the same hair, the same forehead, and the same eyes——" "And the same nose!" she added quickly. He has stopped calling at that house.

Hadn't Read It.

THEY were talking of poetry, and as he held her hand and looked into her eyes she asked him if he remembered the name of a certain poet. "He writes the most uncommon poetry about common things," she said. "I cannot think of his name, you know; he is the poet who writes so much in the vernacular." "Yes, dear," he said; "but I never read that magazine."

Took the Bull by the Horns.

ONE of the clerks in a prominent banking-house, having an intimation that it was proposed to dispense with his services, boldly entered the manager's private room, and said: "Mr. Smith, I have made up my mind that the interests of this bank require that either you or myself leave its service. As you are the leading man of the bank, and have a large family to support, I have concluded to leave you your position, and retire myself."

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Music the Mesmerist.

Telling of a Desperate Scheme which was Frustrated.

It was evident that she did not love him, and yet it was announced that she was to marry him. I was only a guest in the house, but the affair troubled me and I sought long and earnestly for an explanation of it. So far as I could judge Mary had a distinct aversion to Ralph Weston, rather than an affection for him, but nevertheless he seemed to dominate her life. She feared him, but for some reason chose to keep secret the cause of that fear. I could see her almost shrink from him when he called, but she dared not refuse to see him or break the engagement which her father had sanctioned.

What was the secret of his power? I asked myself. Why did she not go to her father—easy-going, blind old Mark Tottenham—and tell him she could not marry this man? I could see no reason why she should sacrifice herself. Her father was wealthy and Weston was not. Surely the latter had no hold upon the old gentleman that made such a marriage imperative. On the contrary, my observation led me to believe that Mr. Tottenham thought he was acting for the best interests of his daughter. He liked Weston—who could be extremely affable and entertaining when he wished, although usually rather taciturn—but there was nothing to indicate that he had his heart set on the match.

Yet Mary shuddered a little when her accepted suitor called, then greeted him with a show of cordiality and went blindly with him to the little reception-room, from which from time to time strains of music were wafted. Weston was a musician of no mean ability, and occasionally entertained us all with selections on the piano, but the fitful way in which he played when they were alone together impressed me as being rather strange. He seldom played a selection through in those circumstances, but seemed rather to run over the keys idly, improvising or giving a few bars from one air and then a few bars from another. Once when he was doing this I thought I heard a wild, pleading cry of "Oh, don't!" and then a half-smothered shriek, and, when he played for us all, the frightened look in Mary's eyes was enough to haunt a man for life. Apparently, however, I was the only one who noticed it.

Finally, overstepping even the liberty accorded to an old friend, I spoke plainly to her. I told her it was plain she did not love him and asked her why she did not go frankly to her father, tell him so, and break the engagement. The bare suggestion seemed to frighten her, and she shuddered as she answered: "I dare not, I dare not. He'd kill me."

"Kill you!" I exclaimed. "Nonsense! Your father has only your welfare at heart, and——"

"No, no; not my father," she interrupted. "I mean Mr. Weston. He has the keynote."

The keynote! I was more mystified than ever, but she gave me no chance to ask for an explanation. She hurried away as if already alarmed at what she had said; yet it seemed to me that she regarded me after that as one who was more in her confidence than others and to whom she might look for protection from some impending evil. Still I could not understand what she meant by the "keynote," and she avoided the subject as if it were fraught with great personal danger. When I asked her to explain she trembled and shook her head.

"No one would believe me," she said. "It is so strange, so weird. And he would kill me. He has threatened to and I know he would."

"Your nerves are overwrought," I replied. "Unless I misjudge the man, he would not know one end of a revolver from the other, and this is not the age for that sort of thing, anyway."

"But you don't understand," she insisted, laying her hand on my arm as if that gave her confidence, but nevertheless looking about her in a frightened way. "He has the keynote."

"That's what you said before," I returned, taking both her hands and holding her in front of me. "What do you mean by it? Tell me frankly. I'll believe you and I'll help you."

"If I thought you would?" she said doubtingly.

She seemed on the point of telling me her story, but evidently thought better of it.

"Wait," she said. "You shall see for yourself. He is coming to-night, and I will hide you behind the curtains. But don't let him kill me! If he tries to do it, knock him down—brain him—drive him away from the piano at all costs!"

There was a world of pathos in the earnestness with which she said that, and for the first time I began to understand the affair. There is a keynote to everything, as science has demonstrated. Just the right chord will make a glass shiver into a million pieces. If the keynote of St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey could only be discovered, either structure might be crumbled into dust, and it is not an unknown thing for articles in the vicinity of great organs to fall in pieces upon the sounding of a certain note. Indeed, I myself have felt the sudden emotional thrill that comes from the striking of a certain chord, and, I meditated, it is quite possible that if Weston had discovered the particular note to which Mary's nerves responded he might be capable of doing her enormous bodily harm.

That evening I was carefully concealed behind the window draperies when Weston called, and it is needless to say that my interest was intense. She shuddered as he drew her towards him, but remained passive in his embrace.

"To-morrow," he said, "we will be quietly married."

"No," she replied, and I could see that it was only with an effort that she forced herself to say it.

"But I insist!" he exclaimed. "I will no longer run the risk of losing you, and you promised yesterday."

"I've changed my mind," she answered shortly.

"Have a care!" he returned menacingly, releasing her and moving towards the piano.

Whether it was my presence that inspired her I know not, but for the first time, as she afterwards told me, her spirit was roused and she dared him.

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"Kill me if you will!" she cried. "Since the fateful night since you first accidentally struck that chord and saw the effect it had on me, I have lived in almost constant fear of death or insanity, which is worse. I have trembled whenever you have touched the keys, even in the presence of others. You have played, as it seemed to me, on the live nerves of my body, and from very fear forced me to acquiesce in whatever you proposed, but I'll put a stop to it now. I will not marry you to-morrow or at any other time."

"Think again," he said softly, but nevertheless threateningly, as he seated himself at the piano and idly ran his fingers over the keys. "Remember! This is a power I will have always. I have no fear that I will kill you, but wherever I may find you I can inflict upon you the excruciating torture that you dread. Even at the altar this chord——"

He never finished the sentence, for as he spoke she uttered a sudden cry. Her face became deathly white and she swayed and shook like a leaf. I sprang from behind the curtains, but before I reached him he had struck the chord again and with a moan she collapsed and sank in a heap on the floor.

I did not handle him very gently, and when the others came in, attracted by the noise, he was in a fit condition to interview a doctor. He said when he left that he would find an opportunity to carry his threat into execution, and that she never would be able to escape that chord so long as both he and she lived.

She and her father left for a trip on the Continent a week later and Weston disappeared soon after. He intimated that it was his purpose to follow them. If he did, and her father remained in the same humour, in which I last saw him, I am satisfied that there is one musical genius occupying a grave somewhere on the Continent. But I have heard of no such tragedy.

E. Flower.

OUR COLOURED COVER FOR NEXT WEEK'S NUMBER.

"PITY! FOR YOUR CHILD'S SAKE." "MY CHILD! NO, *YOUR* CHILD."

A dramatic incident from our powerful story in next week's number, entitled:

"ANOTHER WOMAN'S CHILD."

CATCHING AN EARLY TRAIN.

One of the greatest delights of going into the country for the summer is the pleasure a man derives from his efforts to catch the early morning train by which he must reach the city and his business.

When he gets out of bed he looks at his watch and finds he has plenty of time, so he dresses leisurely, and sits down to breakfast in a calm and serene state of mind. Just as he cracks his first egg he hears the station bell ringing.

He starts, jerks out his watch, compares it with the clock, and finds that it is seventeen minutes slow, and that he has only six minutes left in which to get to the station.

In a fearful hurry he tries to scoop the egg out of the shell, but it burns his fingers and mashes into a hopeless mess.

He drops the whole concern in disgust, grabs a roll, and scalds his tongue with a quick mouthful of coffee, then he stuffs the roll into his pocket, while his wife hands him his bag and tells him she thinks she hears the whistle.

He plunges madly round the room looking for his umbrella, he kisses his wife as well as he can, says good-bye to the children in a lump, and makes a dash for the door. Just as he gets to the gate he finds that he has forgotten a parcel, and he charges back after it, snatches it up, and tears down the gravel path in a frenzy.

He doesn't like to run through the village because that would be undignified; but he walks furiously. He goes faster and faster. Half way down he does hear the whistle for certain.

He wants to run, but he knows that he will start up that dog there by the grocer's if he does. Then he actually sees the train coming into the station, and he feels that he must make a dash. He does. The dog becomes excited, and tears after him.

Six other dogs join in the chase, one after the other, and bark furiously, and frolic round his legs.

Small boys contribute to the excitement as he goes past, whistling on their fingers, and the men at work on the new village club knock off to look at him and laugh.

He feels ridiculous; but he must catch that train. He gets desperate when he has to slacken up until two or three women, who are on the pavement discussing the servant-girl question and the price of butter, scatter to let him pass. He arrives within one hundred yards of the station with coat-tails horizontal, and the dogs nipping his heels, just as the train commences to move.

He puts on extra pressure, and resolves to catch the train or perish.

He reaches it as the guard's van is going past. He seizes the handle, is violently jerked up and down, once or twice, but finally lands on the step on his knees, and is launched in by his coat-collar by the guard, hot, angry, dusty, with his trousers torn across the knees, his shins bruised, and three ribs of his umbrella broken.

Just as he gets into the van the train stops, backs up to the siding, and leisurely picks up a water-cress truck.

Then he is angrier than ever, and determines that he will move back to town to-morrow, and uses naughty words, while he looks out of the window and watches the dogs that followed him engaged in a contest over a bone, and he registers a silent vow to devote his first holiday to hunting up those dogs and braining them with a club.

J. L. P.

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MRS. BRENNAN'S "KID."

A Charming Little Tale of a Three-year-old Peacemaker.

The entire neighbourhood had long since decided that Mrs. Brennan's youngest hopeful would close his earthly career through the unwelcome attentions of the proverbial hangman. Maggie Brennan, aged fifteen, was a popular employee at Johnson's cigar factory. Young Dan was a telegraph boy, and even little Jennie earned odd pennies by caring for the neighbours' children when the parents were called away to christenings, funerals and weddings.

But from the day that the "Kid," at the tender age of nine months, had fallen from a window to the area below, striking a clothes line en route, and had sat up howling vigorously, but unhurt, his young life had been marked by a succession of stirring and nerve-distracting events. Even his good-natured Irish mother had begun to regard him as hopeless, and his one friend was pretty Miss Harris, whose pink and blue blouses and daintily embroidered skirts decorated the Brennan clothes horse each ironing day. Meta Harris always declared that the "Kid" was particularly intelligent, and some day would perform a great deed.

On this afternoon the "Kid," having reached the age of three, and having acquired sufficient wisdom to snatch a stick of liquorice from a weaker and meeker playmate in the gutter, had wandered far from home.

An overdose of liquorice on this hot, sultry day had affected the "Kid" as nothing had ever done before. He yearned for the narrow, dim court and the towering tenement, to say nothing of a drink and his mother's restful bosom. But all around him was mud, the thick, yellow mud of a newly-opened street, and beyond disgustingly new cottages painted in æsthetic tints and surrounded by gardens laid out in geometrical flower and lawn patterns. That is, all were thus laid out, save one. It was overgrown with weeds, which had choked out the flowers planted there early in the spring.

A young man, in a natty flannel suit, had paused at the gate and was surveying, with a clouded brow, the scene of desolation. It hardly seemed possible that just four months previous he and she had planted those flowers, coming up each evening to water them, pick out the weeds and put finishing touches within doors.

The furniture had been put in place, even some of the shining crockery had found its way to the small pantry, when the quarrel came.

He had done his best to smooth over the difficulty, but finally one afternoon he had walked over to the little cottage, which represented his savings of two hard years, closed and barred the windows and doors, and with a heavy heart had walked out through the small gate. Never again had he been near the burial ground of his high hopes—until this evening. Vaguely he felt lately that something ought to be done with the place.

The frown deepened as he turned away and marched resolutely down the street. He would see an estate agent at once and offer the place at any sacrifice. Then he'd try his luck in South Africa. The papers all said there were splendid openings down there for clever fellows from home.

"Mamma! Ma——!"

Jack Griswold stopped communing with the disagreeable past and stared down upon a bedraggled, forlorn bit of humanity.

"Hello, old chap. What are you doing here?"

The "old chap" resented the familiar address, fell to weeping lustily and rolled disconsolately in the soft mud.

"Oh, I say," exclaimed Jack, bending over the little fellow, "you mustn't do that! You'll be a sight. I suppose you're lost."

Griswold glanced helplessly at the neat cottages and then at the child of the slums. How ever did the youngster get out here? And his sobs were actually pitiful. Jack thought of a policeman, but such officials were seldom needed in this quiet neighbourhood.

Finally pity overcame discretion, and Jack grasped a small hand and led the runaway towards the cottage over which he had but lately been gloating in misery. He unlocked the door and led the culprit to the kitchen, turned on the water and awkwardly washed the astonished denizen of Diggle's Court.

"There, when I get a few layers of dirt off I'll take you to the nearest police station and they can find your 'ma.' But I'll be hanged if I'd drag such a connecting link as you were through the streets."

A fresh handkerchief was sacrificed on the altar of cleanliness, and then Griswold started towards the door with his unexpected charge. But here another surprise was in store for him. The skies were overcast and lightning was playing along the horizon. There was nothing to do but wait till the storm passed by.

Griswold sank into a chair in the tiny parlour, and Mrs. Brennan's "Kid" clambered familiarly upon his knee. The afternoon was sultry, the little head sank lower and lower on Griswold's immaculate flannel suit, and soon a soft, even breathing filled the quiet room.

The storm gathered and burst, but the child slept on, and Griswold, with half closed eyes, lived over again the happy days when she and he had planned and furnished the cottage.

A sudden flash of vivid lightning and a shrill feminine shriek!

"Oh, Mrs. Brennan, if only I had a key we could get in here! And porches and trees are so dangerous!"

Jack rose to his feet, the sleeping child still clasped in his arms. There was no mistaking that sweet voice. For an instant he hesitated, then threw open the door.

Two women crouched in the portal. One was middle aged and haggard, her sleeves rolled up to her elbow, and her apron tossed over her head. The other was young, and dainty and fair to look upon, even in her tearful fright. They rose and faced the sudden vision in the doorway.

The older woman gave a scream, half of anger, half of joy.

"It's me Kid! Where did ye foind him?" Then without waiting for reply she jerked the sleeping child from Griswold's arms and fell to weeping and scolding over him in true Irish fashion.

Ten minutes later the storm died down as suddenly as it had risen, and Mrs. Brennan and her "Kid," duly provided with 'bus fare, were wending their way towards Diggle's Court.

The younger woman still stood at the window, staring out upon the weeds, which hung heavy with moisture. She tapped her fingers mechanically on the window pane.

"I had gone over to Mrs. Brennan's for a blouse I wanted," she remarked suddenly, as if she felt that an explanation was obligatory. "And she was nearly crazy about the 'Kid.' I felt so sorry for her, and we kept walking, and walking, and every one had seen the little boy, they said, and we followed the trail till we got here—and——"

She turned suddenly and faced Griswold, who was regarding her anxiously. The contrast between his grave, pleading face and his generally demoralised attire was ludicrous. The departed "Kid" had left as mementoes of his short stay liberal stains of liquorice and mud on Griswold's soft flannel suit. One grimy hand had evidently found a resting place on Jack's smooth shaven cheek.

Meta Harris stopped laughing and exclaimed:

"Oh, to think you'd be so good to that miserable 'Kid.' You've made me feel so—so mean and insignificant." Her face was very sober now. "Do you think, Jack, you could forgive me, and——"

"Bless that 'Kid,'" exclaimed Jack as they walked home in the twilight. Meta had resolutely refused to take a 'bus in consideration of Jack's soiled raiment. "When we get settled the little chap can play up here every Saturday."

"Yes," mused Meta, "I always said that boy would do something worth doing."

Cicelly Allen.

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YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

Author of "Fettered Lives," "As a Man Sows," "In the Grip of the Law," etc.

For New Readers.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude. Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, sets himself to prove the latter's guilt. Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compels her to acknowledge her mistake. In the meanwhile, Scarsdale, who has got into trouble for attacking a warder who jested with him about Esther, is taken seriously ill, and placed in the prison hospital, where he succeeds in writing a letter to Esther and giving it to a convict named Ben Needham, who has finished his sentence and has promised to deliver it to Esther upon his release.

At about this time Esther and Mr. Crump are walking together when they observe Vance about to throw herself in the reservoir. Crump stops her just in time—he and Esther taking her back to The Woodlands. Later on Revelle and Benny drive up in a dogcart, and suddenly, while talking to Esther, Revelle turns deadly pale. Crump is standing by, and quickly sees the reason for his emotion. Vance is approaching. She goes straight up to Revelle. It is a critical moment, but once more Revelle's iron will wins the day. Again apologising for her mistake in calling Revelle her husband, she allows herself to be led away. Later on she is placed in the county asylum. A charity concert is now announced, in which both Esther and Benny are billed to take part. Revelle, of course, is present; so also is Mr. Crump.

CHAPTER XX.

How Seaton Revelle Manœuvred to be Alone with Esther.

THE concert had not yet started when Seaton Revelle returned to his seat between Lady Eliza Normanhurst and Esther. Punctuality is not always a characteristic of amateur performances. A hum of conversation filled the room. The Vicar was talking with Lord Normanhurst most enthusiastically on the subject of the restoration of his church. Then came a momentary lull.

"That was a remarkable escape of that convict from Greystone Prison, wasn't it? I suppose you read about it in the papers. The fellow seems to have got clean away, what's more!"

The words, addressed by a man to his companion, reached Esther—and Seaton Revelle.

Greystone Prison! Alec was there! Surroundings were forgotten now. Esther's face had gone ghastly white. Her heart had ceased to beat. What if——

"Yes, I saw something about it. What was the fellow's name?"

It seemed an eternity of time to Esther before the answer came. Revelle, though seeming not to do so, was watching her out of the corners of his eyes. He inwardly reviled the man behind for having started the topic. It meant the awakening, perhaps, of what he told himself Esther was rapidly forgetting. Savage annoyance was his first feeling; then a shadowy look of uneasiness played across his features.

Greystone prison. Scarsdale was there!

"A fellow called Crofton—known among the prisoners as Gentleman Jack! By the way, Greystone prison's the place, isn't it, where that——"

The man stopped abruptly, coughed, and then stammered out something about the awful time they were being kept waiting. He had momentarily forgotten that Miss Mansfield was sitting in front of him. Scarsdale's name had been on the tip of his tongue when his companion had brought his elbow sharply home into his ribs.

The moment of suspense—for Esther—was over; but the uneasy shadow on Revelle's face seemed to have deepened. But he pulled himself together, and answered a question addressed to him by Lady Eliza.

"Yes! They *are* a long time; but the local orchestra opens the ball, and I've always noticed that amateurs take an awful time to tune up. They are at it now!"

The plaintive wail of stringed instruments floated into the room. Esther outwardly seemed herself again; but her gloved hands were tightly clenched. It was hard to bear! It was a hard, heart-straining part that she had set herself to play. And this was what Crump, as he sat holding Pollie's hot little hand, was telling himself.

"Yes, Pollie, yes!" he said aloud, "they are coming in now. We shall be starting in a minute. What's that funny looking thing? Why that's what is called a double-bass. Yes, it's a big fiddle; but too big to be tucked under anybody's chin. It's a kind of hoarse-voiced fiddle, and it grunts instead of squeaking. That gentleman, looking very important, with white gloves and the stick, is the conductor. The only thing that he beats is time, and"—the little man chuckled—"not always that, Pollie."

"Doesn't he sing, or play, or do nothing?" questioned Pollie.

"No, only wags that stick; he may get excited; but nobody will take any notice of that!"

"Then he's not much use!" said Pollie decidedly.

"Sometimes most useful, most essential—when he is paid attention to; but I don't think that will happen to-night!"

And Crump was right. The opening overture—after a false start—was played in a go-as-you-please style ; but it was all in the cause of charity, and charity covers a multitude of sins.

Then a pale young man tootled a melancholy flute solo that suggested wind escaping from bellows rather than melody.

After that, another young man, with long hair, and wearing pince-nez, evidently endeavouring to look as much as possible like Sir Henry Irving, recited "The Dream of Eugene Aram," ; he would have been more impressive but for an unfortunate lapse of memory ; but even as it was, he thrilled the sixpenny seats, and one lady remarked that "He'd fair given her creeps !"

Crump chuckled quietly to himself. He had a strong sense of humour.

A love ditty by a Miss Gushington followed, the first stanza of which ran as follows :

Love's twining fingers wreath my heart,
Alas, my own, that we must part,
Alas, to think that Cupid's bow
Could wing a shaft so full of woe !

And the curate, who accompanied her, bent over the ivory keys and heaved a bitter sigh. For he loved the fair Gushington, and, though she had embroidered a pair of braces for him, and had sent him a pair of slippers two sizes too small for him, he had not dared as yet to tell his love !

Then Mr. Faversham appeared on the platform. Very dapper he looked in his evening dress, and there was just a suggestion of the actor about his clean-shaven face. The man who is nervous in the drawing-room is frequently quite self-possessed and at home on a platform or stage. It was so with Benny. Had circumstance ordered his life differently, he might have made a name for himself on the music hall stage.

"Herbert Giles, alias the Tinker !" said Crump to himself, "the impertinence of the fellow is really almost delightful. It would be quite ; but——"

Then his little eyes wandered to where Esther was sitting, and he sighed. Tragedy and comedy were strangely jumbled together that night.

Suddenly, however, as the preliminary chords were being played on the piano, Benny showed signs of nervousness. He was conscious of a pair of dark eyes bent upon him—eyes that stabbed into his conscience, eyes that made him for the moment forget his words, and made him think of a "poor devil" away in a gloomy convict prison, doing time ! But he managed to banish the picture conjured up, just in time, and started to sing :

Oh, when I was single, oh, then,
Oh, when I was single, oh, then,
Oh, when I was single,
My pockets did jingle,
I long to be single again !

There were several verses. At the conclusion of the song, he was vociferously encored.

Pollie clapped her hands together most excitedly.

"Isn't he a funny man !" she whispered to Crump.

"A very funny fellow !" said Crump, with a twinkling of his grey eyes. "A very funny fellow, indeed, Pollie !"

It was useless for Benny to bow. He was compelled to respond with a second song.

"How delightfully funny he is !" said Lady Eliza Normanhurst to Revelle ; "you must dine with us one night at the Towers, and bring Mr. Faversham. He's quite too screamingly funny !"

Benny's next song, "The Polka and the Choir-boy !"—the Vicar looked a little nervous at first ; but it was genuinely funny without being irreverent or vulgar—was even a greater success than the first. Three times he was recalled ; again bowing did not satisfy the audience. They meant to hear him again.

"Encore, encore, encore !"

At last the applause ceased. Benny stepped forward to the edge of the platform.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I'm sorry to say that I have run out of songs ; but, with your permission, in place of another song, I will give you a short recitation entitled 'Burglar Jack !'"

Revelle, clever as he was at disguising his feelings, tugged hard at his moustache, and vainly tried to conceal a smile. This was irony indeed ! A matchless piece of impertinence on Benny's part.

"What are you laughing at ?" asked Pollie, looking up into Crump's face.

"He's such a funny fellow !" chuckled the little man. "Oh, this is rich, very rich indeed !"

And Crump, for a moment only seeing the the humorous side of the case, grew quite red in the face with suppressed mirth.

The recitation proved partly humorous, partly pathetic—it dealt with a hardened, crime-stained burglar who was interrupted in the early hours of the morning by a little child, who ultimately melted his heart. Now there was loud laughter from, now a tendency to swallow at an invisible lump among the audience. The Vicar looked pleased. The recitation inculcated a moral lesson.

"Charming !" said Lady Eliza Normanhurst at the conclusion, "quite too charming ! Really he made me feel quite sad. He ought to have been an actor, Mr. Revelle !"

"I daresay," answered Revelle, "he would have been, if he had been compelled to earn his living ; but you know how often it is the case—money often suppresses talent. Where a fellow has no spur to drive him on, don't you know, he takes things slackly ; makes a hobby of a thing instead of going in for it in real earnest. That's been the case with my friend Faversham !"

"By the way, is he any connection with the Norfolk Favershams ?"

"Distantly related—yes !" replied Revelle unblushingly.

And Mr. Faversham, otherwise Benny Beard, alias Herbert Giles, the Tinker, who had suffered five years' penal servitude, went up thirty-five per cent., in Lady Eliza Normanhurst's estimation.

Esther rose up quietly, and made her way round to the room at the back of the platform where the performers were gathered together. After a second solo from the young gentleman on the flute, it was her turn to appear.

Revelle watched her as she moved on to the platform. Apart from her money, he told himself, she was well worth winning for herself. The song she sang was an old English ballad—there was nothing in it about "Love's twining fingers !"—and it went straight to the hearts of the audience.

"Your eyes are watering !" said Pollie, looking up into Crump's face, when the last soft notes had melted away.

"Yes, Pollie, yes !"—the little man blew his nose violently. —"I'm—I'm suffering from a slight cold in my head ! And, apart from that, the song was most touching, and"—he added to himself—"the singer !"

"Encore !" shouted the audience.

"I wish they wouldn't !" thought Crump, "I really wish they wouldn't. But they don't know the strain. Ah, it's the old play of 'Masks and Faces !'"

At the conclusion of the concert it was the general opinion that Miss Mansfield and Mr. Faversham had divided the honours between them. There was a touch of irony in that !

"And you've enjoyed yourself, Pollie ?" asked Crump, as they passed out of the building.

"Oh, ever so much. I liked that funny gentleman ; but I think I liked Miss Mansfield best !"

"I did !" said the little man.

Then a smartly equipped brougham dashed past them. Crump caught a glimpse of the two occupants—Seaton Revelle and Esther. Benny had acted upon the instructions given him, and had made himself scarce.

"What did you say ?" asked Pollie, as an exclamation burst rather suddenly from the little man to whose hand she was tightly clinging.

"Damp !" said Crump, "I was saying the evening air seemed a little damp !"

He felt compelled to tell an untruth. He could not have

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told Pollie what he had really said. It was quite the exception for him to use strong language; but on this occasion a strong word had slipped out, and "him" had followed it. He had jumped at a conclusion as to what would happen before the brougham reached the Woodlands, and his indignation had mastered him.

"I think," said Revelle, "the whole affair went off splendidly, Miss Mansfield. You sang most charmingly!"

Esther could not help a little shudder. She was alone with the man whom, beyond all others, she loathed and despised. She was conscious of his eyes being upon her, could almost feel the look of admiration shining from them.

"I—er—I'm awfully sorry that your father couldn't come on with us; and yet I'm—I can't help being glad of this opportunity of being alone with you. Perhaps—perhaps, you can guess the reason why?"

At first Esther Mansfield had attracted him as other women had attracted him. She was pretty, fascinating, possessed of a peculiar charm of her own, and, one day, would inherit a fortune. He had entered the brougham believing that his heart was well under control of his head. Hitherto, he had never been led by passion. His utter selfishness had always been supreme. He was only conscious now that Esther appealed to him as no other woman had done before.

Away in the County asylum a lifeless-eyed woman, with an expressionless face, from which a former prettiness had been washed out, was talking to herself in a low monotone about Jim—her husband!

The good-looking man in evening dress turned his face towards Esther. She could not meet his gaze—a burning one now—lest he should read the fierce hate and loathing that burnt in her own—this man who had torn the man she loved from her. Instinct told her what was coming.

With a quick movement he took one of her hands in his own. With a little cry, as if his touch had burnt her, she snatched it from him.

Her action seemed only to embolden him. A moment later he had grasped her hand again.

"Esther," he breathed out quickly, "I want an answer to a question. I love you! Is there any hope for me?"

Her every feeling of delicacy was outraged. Though, womanlike, she had realised what was coming, though, in a measure, she had steeled herself to play her part in the presence of the man she loathed beyond expression, her first and almost irresistible impulse was to snatch her hand from the clasp that seemed to scorch her, and strike him across the face; and, with the blow, to shriek out her hate, her utter detestation for him!

Her face, white as death, was averted. The blue veins on her forehead throbbed with the pulse of passionate emotion. She had made no movement. Revelle still held her hand, icy, trembling, yet unresisting. He was well enough versed in the art of love-making. He had pleaded with other women as he was pleading now; but never before in such deadly earnest! She was different from those other women—something more to him than they had ever been!

"Esther, Esther!" He could not see her eyes, nor the strange fire that burnt within them. "You don't answer my question? I ask you again. Answer me. Is there any hope?"

A lamp burnt in the interior of the brougham. He could not see her eyes; but he saw the hot blood suffuse her white cheeks and mount to her forehead. And, with it, life seemed to return to her. With a quick movement she snatched free her hand. Her nostrils were dilated and quivering. Her bosom heaving tumultuously.

"Esther!"

"Don't call me by that name! Don't—don't speak to me!"

"Don't keep me in suspense. I—I must have an answer to my question!"

"You have no right to speak to me like this!"—the words came quickly, and so low that they were scarcely audible. "Have you forgotten altogether the past—my past?"

She had nerved herself up to play her part!

There was reproach in her words; but, to Seaton Revelle, it seemed not harsh reproach. He told himself that she was struggling between conscience and an inclination to listen to him.

"But surely," he whispered, "it isn't right that the past should enter into the present. The past is done with—I had hoped it was forgotten. It is the present, the future now."

"No"—there was a strange ring in her voice as she breathed out the words—"the past is not done with—for me! Do you think I can forget so soon?"

"I had hoped that time had deadened remembrance; that you had forgotten the man who wronged you so cruelly!"

She drew in her breath sharply. Woman though she was, at that moment she felt tempted to fly at his throat for the lying words he had uttered.

"But," he went on, "forgive me for having spoken as I have done. Forgive me if my love for you has carried me away. I don't ask for an answer to my question now. But I shall not change! I shall wait and hope. I shall ask you the same question again some day!"

He waited for a moment, as if expecting her to say something, but Esther neither stirred nor spoke. He held out his hand.

"Miss Mansfield, say you have forgiven me for what I have said! Tell me that it will make no difference in the future to our—our friendship?"

She took the outstretched hand. Her lips parted as though she would speak; but the words refused to come. Try hard as she would she could not utter that lie, though it would have been spoken to serve the man she loved. And yet she must say something!

"What has happened," she said at last, speaking in a low, quivering voice, "will make no—no difference, Mr. Revelle!"

No difference to her hate—no difference to her determination to struggle to bring the truth to light, to unmask the man beside her, who, mis-reading her words, utterly miscalculating, believed that he would win her yet! It was only a matter of time. He had spoken too prematurely, but he did look upon her refusal as final and absolute. He would win Benny's money yet!

"I couldn't bear to think," he went on, "that—that you would be any different to me from what you have been; that my presumption had sacrificed your friendship!"

He possessed all the outward polish of a gentleman. Had Esther only not known, there was nothing that he had actually said or done entitled to reproach.

The brougham drew up outside the Woodlands. Revelle alighted, rang the bell, then assisted out Esther.

"Tell me," he pleaded, "this will make no difference?"

"It will make no difference!" she answered mechanically.

If he could only have seen her a few minutes later, as, alone in her room, she buried her face in her hands, and gave way to a paroxysm of tears! Her very womanhood had been outraged. That he should have dared to speak to her as he had done; dared to assume that in a few short months she had forgotten the man she loved—would be willing to listen to another!

But Revelle had not seen, and, as he returned to the Firs, he was not altogether dissatisfied with himself. The thin edge of the wedge had been introduced. Then his face hardened a little.

Pah! But she was packed safely away. That corner seemed safely weathered. Twice, in the presence of witnesses, she had denied herself; yet——

He lit a cigarette. It was an unfortunate incident.

"So Crofton," he muttered presently, "has managed to escape. I'm glad—infernally glad—it wasn't the other fellow!"

The silent Railton admitted him. Mr. Faversham, he said, had already returned, and was in the billiard-room.

"How are you getting on?" said Revelle, in a low voice. "I saw you at the concert."

"Slowly, but well, sir! I am getting on very friendly terms with those two young constables. They are, sir, if I may use the expression, very 'green.' I am gleaning much

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information that may be useful. To-morrow evening, if I have your permission, I shall visit my friend, Mr. Piper, Lord Normanhurst's butler. His Lordship and her Ladyship are dining out."

"You're doing good work, Railton. I'm pleased with you!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Revelle made his way to the billiard-room where Benny, flushed a little with his triumph and a couple of whiskeys and sodas on the top of champagne, was knocking the balls about. He looked up as Revelle entered.

"You haven't won your bet?" he said.

"No," answered Revelle carelessly; "but there's still plenty of time!"

Benny gave a sigh of relief. He was a blackguard; but not absolutely a hopeless one. He was thankful—for Esther's sake!

CHAPTER XXI.
How a Letter Reached Esther.

A week had passed since the village concert, and the walls of Warham were placarded now with great posters announcing yet another and far more important festivity in connection with the raising of funds for the restoration of the Parish Church—a grand fête, under the direct patronage of Lord and Lady Normanhurst, to be held in the magnificent grounds that surrounded the Towers. In the village it was the one topic of conversation. In the posters much was made of the fact that Seaton Revelle, Esq., of the Firs, Warham, would in the course of the day, weather permitting, make a number of ascents in a captive balloon, taking with him a limited number of passengers. Tickets could be obtained either from the Vicar or Lord Normanhurst. The entertainment would conclude with a grand, free ascent by Seaton Revelle, Esq.

Tom Jackson, on duty outside the railway station, was scrutinising one of these posters.

A London train had just arrived, and a few passengers were passing out of the gates.

One of them was a powerful, broad-shouldered man, with rugged features, iron-grey hair, and on one side of his face stretched a deep scar that lost itself in his hair. He was wearing a peaked cap, and his coat, unbuttoned, revealed a blue jersey, across which was embroidered in red letters, "Salvation Army." He was evidently a stranger to the neighbourhood, for he looked about him with uncertainty, then moved across to Tom Jackson.

"Can yer tell me," he said, "whether there's a Mr. Mansfield living anywhere about here, and how I gets to his house?"

Tom Jackson looked at him with surprise, wondering what the Salvation Army man had in common with the rich banker.

"Why, yes, keep up the main road, and about a mile and a quarter on you'll see Mr. Mansfield's house, it stands off the road on the left-hand side."

"Thank yer, much obliged."

Tom followed him with his eyes.

"Rather a rough-looking customer," he said to himself, "wonder what his business with Mr. Mansfield is?"

"And now to see her," muttered the man, as he strode out with a peculiar dogged step, "and give them messages. I promised 'im, and Ben Needham keeps his word!"

When he had passed out of the village and there was no one to see him, he drew from his pocket two official-looking papers, and a dirty, thumb-marked, crumpled letter that had the appearance of having been rolled up, at one time or another, into a ball.

"It give me a lot of trouble to git it through, but in spite of all them searchings, I fair diddled 'em."

The name of Esther Mansfield was roughly scrawled in pencil across the smudged envelope.

Then, though he had read them through often enough before, he glanced at the other papers. One of them was a copy of His Majesty's license to be at large during the remaining portion of his term of penal servitude, and stated that if Benjamin Needham were convicted before the expiration of the said term of some indictable offence within the United King-

A New Industry for English Girls.

According to a statement recently made by the manager of a well-known London hat company, arrangements are now being made for the opening up of a new industry, viz., Panama hat making in England. This new industry, it is said, will provide employment for hundreds of girls. Factory life has, however, its drawbacks. Headache, biliousness, anæmia, and indigestion, prevail to an enormous extent amongst factory workers, but Bile Beans for Biliousness are a certain cure for these ailments. Proof of this is to be found in the following statement of Mrs. G. Woodcroft, a straw hat maker of 29 Essex Street, Luton. To a representative of the *Luton Reporter*, she said:

"Ever since I can recollect, I have suffered a good deal from biliousness. It has sometimes kept me from following my occupation at the factory for five days out of the six. When these attacks came on they were accompanied by giddiness. My sight was also affected, and I was unable to see anything very clearly. I continually experienced a sensation of coldness in my arms and legs, and even in the morning I felt sleepy and drowsy. A languid feeling would quite overcome me, and I could not take an interest in anything. I visited many doctors, and took bottle after bottle of their medicine. Then I tried various remedies that my neighbours advised, but still I got no better. Still determined to persevere in my search for health, I tried a number of patent medicines which I saw advertised, but none of them took effect, and I remained as far as ever from being cured.

"Last summer I saw in one of the London papers an account of the benefit that had been derived by persons taking Bile Beans, and I thought I would try them. I wrote for a box and began to take them. In a very short time I felt better. The languid feeling disappeared, and I do not now feel drowsy as I used to do, but on the contrary I have more energy than ever I had before. Since taking Bile Beans, I have not had a single attack of biliousness. Two years ago my husband went away to the war in South Africa, and I was very bad then with biliousness, but Bile Beans have created such a change in me that he will hardly know me when he comes home again. Bile Beans for Biliousness, which accomplished the above cure are purely vegetable in composition, and their excellence has been so well proved that many eminent doctors are now prescribing them largely. They are a certain cure for biliousness, headache, congestion of the liver, neuralgia, fainting fits, attacks of dizziness, indigestion, flatulence, pains in the chest loins, or back, defective secretion of bile, wasting affections, female ailments, rheumatism, gout, skin eruptions, and the host of ailments having a common origin in impurity of the blood, a general congestion of the system, and loss of vital force. Obtainable from all chemists, or post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 & 120 London Wall, London, E.C., upon receipt of prices, one and three halfpence or two and nine.

The Only Efficacious Substitute for Cod Liver Oil—

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In patent air-tight tins, ½lb., 1/4; 1lb., 2/4; 2lb., 4/-; including tin and postage.

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OUR NEW SERIAL.

dom, such license should be immediately forfeited. By law if the license were forfeited, he would be liable to undergo a term of penal servitude equal to the portion of his term of ten years which remained unexpired when the license was granted.

The other paper ran as follows—

"Register No. X. 375. Name, Benjamin Needham. Take notice. You are required by Act of Parliament to report yourself to the chief police-station of the locality to which you may go within forty-eight hours after your arrival therein; and if you change your residence from one police-district to another, you must report it to the police-station to which you last reported yourself, before you go. If you omit any of the above particulars, you will be guilty of a misdemeanour, and, upon conviction, will forfeit your license."

The ticket-of-leave man folded up the papers with a grim smile; then tramped on again. "That must be the house," he muttered, some ten minutes later, "the question is how am I to git to see the young lady. I reckon she won't care about bein' seen talkin' to a cove who's out on ticket!"

He was staring up the drive, doubting what to do, when the front door opened and Esther Mansfield issued and came towards him.

"If this is the young lady," muttered Ben Needham, "I'm in luck!"

And with a husky cough he gripped the crumpled letter.

It was only when she had reached the gates that Esther noticed the strange man standing there. She glanced at his rugged, scarred face, noted the "Salvation Army" embroidered across his jersey, and would have passed on. She was conscious of the fact that the man was staring rather hard at her.

"Axin' yer pardon, Miss"—the man, with a movement of rough politeness, had doffed his cap—"but does a Mr. Mansfield live in yonder house?"

"Yes," answered Esther, a little taken aback by the question, "but he is in London. Can I give him any message?"

And Esther, in her turn, stared at the man's face, wondering what business he could have with her father.

"It ain't with Mr. Mansfield as I wants to speak, but Miss Mansfield. Axin' yer pardon, but I've a sort o' notion its Miss Mansfield I'm speaking to now."

"Yes, I'm Miss Mansfield, but you want to speak with me! What is it?"

Ben Needham glanced first at the house in the background, then down the road.

"I've just come out on ticket," he said, lowering his voice to a whisper. "There was a certain party from where I've come as was pertikler anxious to git a letter through to someone. He axed me to give it, along with one or two messages, to Miss Mansfield."

The first part of the man's speech was incomprehensible to her.

She did not know the meaning of the phrase "to come out on ticket," but the word "letter" had caused the hot blood to flood her cheeks, then the flush ebbed away, leaving them paler than before.

"A letter!" she gasped. "Quick, don't keep me in suspense—from whom?"

In her eagerness she took a step towards him and laid a trembling hand on his sleeve. Ben Needham drew the crumpled, dirty envelope from his pocket.

"From No. 35, Miss," he said, in a husky whisper. He saw her dark eyes dilate as they fell on the scrawled address; he heard the little cry of recognition, a cry of mingled pain and joy; and then, with a gulp, and drawing his hand across his eyes he turned aside his head and stared down upon the ground.

Surroundings were forgotten. Had the road been thronged with men and women, Esther would neither have seen nor heard them. With tear-dimmed eyes she read the pencilled words. He seemed to be speaking to her. Next to her heart she bore a letter—a letter that had passed under the eyes of prison officials. But this one was so different. There was no reserve; no holding back. Though many miles and prison walls intervened, he had spoken to her. Again and again she read the letter, until the fast-falling tears blurred her sight. Then she strained it to her bosom. It had strengthened her, and had given her fresh hope. There is a pain that is closely allied to joy—an indescribable emotion that now thrilled Esther's heart.

Ben Needham had not stirred; his grey head was bent forward, his eyes fastened on the ground. There was a delicacy of feeling somewhere concealed beneath the rough exterior of the ticket-of-leave man and ex-felon. He did not wish to intrude upon her thoughts.

Esther was the first to break the silence.

"You have some—some messages for me," she said, in a low, broken voice.

"Yes, Miss," answered the ticket-of-leave man huskily; "there was a number of messages as I promised 'im I'd give yer. And the last of 'em was ter tell yer—I was standing by 'im just after he'd writ that brief—was to tell yer, Miss—there, don't mind me, I'm an old 'un—was to tell yer that he loved yer!"

Then, haltingly, but almost word for word, he repeated the messages that Alec Scarsdale had whispered to him in the prison ward. He found it a hard task, and more than once he nearly broke down. His voice shook, and he kept his eyes averted, for Esther was crying now like a little child.

"There, there, Missie," he faltered, when the last message had been given, "don't take on so. Look at me, I've done twenty year's time, all told, and I've come out all right."

And, with a rough movement of sympathy, he held out his great, hard hands; Esther took them both in her own.

"He says," she sobbed, "that you have been a good friend to him—how can I thank you, how can I repay you for all you have done?"

"I don't want nor yet ax for nothing, Missie. I'm only too glad to think I've kept my promises as I made 'em—for his sake and for yourn."

"Are you quite sure there is nothing I can do for you. You have done so much for me!"

"No, Missie, I don't want nothink, I'm thankful to say. I've got a job to my liking, and a straight job, too, which ain't altogether usual with me!"

And the old burglar glancing down at the embroidery on his jersey gave a grim smile. Then he glanced up and down the still deserted road.

"Sometimes, Missie," he said, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "it makes me grin a bit when I thinks of myself in this 'ere kit, me, as only a few weeks ago was wearing the prison slops. It seems a bit late in the day to turn over a new leaf—I'm well past fifty, missie, and I cracked my first crib when I was a kid of six, my father shovin' me through a little window for to go round and unbolt the door for 'im and his pal, but they say it's never too late to mend."

Though Esther did not understand many of his words she followed his meaning. Looking at him with bewildered astonishment she realised that she had been brought face to face with a character who represented a side of life of which, till then, she had known nothing.

Ben Needham seemed to read her thought. Again he grimly smiled.

"You ain't met many like me, I'm thinking, Missie, and a good job, too! Well, then, I've kept my promise, and I'll be gettin' back agen. If I can be of any service to yer, you've only to write to Ben Needham, the Barracks, Mile End Road, London—that'll find me. Anythink I can do, I'll do and glad to do it, for yer own sake and for his'n!"

But Esther had a hundred questions to ask—many of them searching questions, prompted by instinct, about prison life in general. And Ben Needham, glancing down into the anxious upturned face, with its piteous, inquiring look, was constrained to twist and smooth over the real facts. He had not forgotten Scarsdale's request to keep from her the truth about prison-life.

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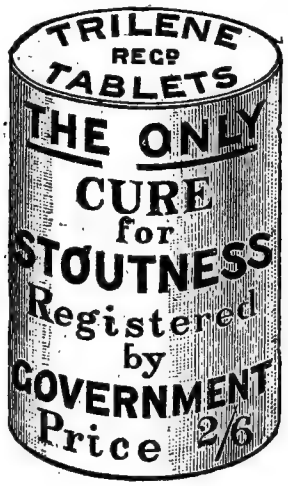

For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

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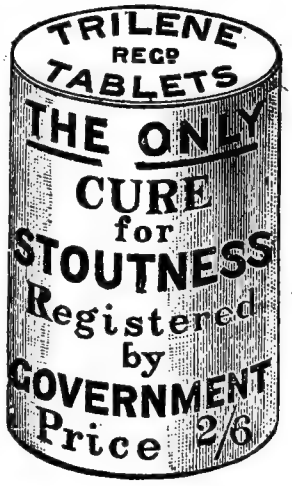

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"37 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Liatorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 6lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Miss JANE CARTER, of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 37 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets, I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

"Good-bye, Missie," he said at last; "don't forget my address. If yer wants me, to ax a sudden question like, the answer of which might ease yer mind, I'll come to yer."

Again Esther took the hard, rough hands in her own, and her words of thanks came from the bottom of her heart. There was a look of sturdy independence about the man that told her delicate sense of perception that to offer him recompense for what he had done in the shape of money would only hurt his feelings.

Raising his cap, Ben Needham said good-bye, and with the same, peculiar, dogged gait, walked back stationwards.

Esther returned to the house—her purpose in leaving it was forgotten—and, in the privacy of her room, again and again re-read the precious letter with its messages of love, of hope, of belief that ultimately justice would be done. Things were just as they had been, Scarsdale was still a prisoner; a terrible term of imprisonment still stretched between him and freedom; yet that letter and those messages had gladdened Esther's heart as it had not been gladdened for many a weary day. They had come as refreshingly as moisture to a drooping flower.

* * * * *

Some three days after Needham's interview with Esther, a registered packet arrived for him at his quarters.

On opening it, he found within a handsome gold watch and chain. There was no accompanying note, but on the back of the watch, plainly engraved, were the words, "To Ben Needham, from Esther Mansfield."

He stared at it; his rugged features twitched; the colour beneath his tan skin deepened.

"Gawd bless 'er! She ain't ashamed to couple her sweet name with mine—me, an old lag—me as ain't fit to breathe the same air as 'er!"

Again he stared hard at the watch and chain.

"I've handled dozens of 'em before"—the same grim smile played across the scared features—"but it's the fust one that I've come by honest. Gawd bless 'er 'eart!"

CHAPTER XXII.

Escaped.

"Now, Mrs. Cobb, I insist! I'm not going to do any work myself to-day. It's a general holiday. And I'm going to take you and Pollie over to this grand *fête* at the Towers. It is, they tell me, going to be a wonderful affair. Steam-horses, shows, even a balloon!"

"Well, well, Mr. Penworthy, it's very kind of you, I'm sure. Though I feel I'm getting too old for this kind of thing!"

"Tut, tut, tut!" said Crump, "that's settled!"

And half an hour later, Crump, his white-haired landlady leaning on his arm, and Pollie holding on to one hand, his homely face aglow—he loved to give pleasure to other people—left Woodbine Cottage for the Towers. His patience was being tried; but he possessed the faculty of being able to temporarily set his worries on one side; and though matters were at a standstill, he was not dissatisfied. His affairs were in good order, and his nets spread.

"Oh—o—o—oh! Look!" said Pollie presently, pointing excitedly upwards, "there's the balloon!"

A captive balloon, in the distance looking like a toy, had risen up above the tops of some trees, then presently came to a standstill, swaying to and fro like an inverted pendulum!

"Yes, that's the balloon, Pollie!" said Crump; then thought of Vance, away in the County asylum, just visible from the Towers, and Jim! The little man's face lost its look of gaiety, and Pollie tugged rather impatiently at his hand, and had to repeat her question twice—what made balloons go up into the air?—before Crump realised that he was being spoken to. Then he explained that it was gas, and added that gas sometimes was the power also that raised human beings into high places in the world as well as balloons!

Then Crump guided his two charges out of the road to one side as the rattle of wheels and hoofs told of an approaching carriage. The next minute, he was raising his hat deferentially to John Mansfield and Esther as they were carried past.

"I like that little fellow Penworthy, Esther," said the banker, "he's quiet, gentlemanly, and unassuming, and, moreover, he knows his business. That front garden of ours will be vastly improved by the time he's done with it. Hallo!"—he pointed to the distant balloon—"our friend Revelle is already sky high! I must say he is a tremendous addition to the neighbourhood, so full of enterprise. I hear there's some talk of his being nominated for a Justice of the Peace. Normanhurst has taken to him, and it's his idea!"

As the carriage rolled through the gates, two strapping young constables on duty outside brought their hands sharply to the salute, and one of them coloured up under his helmet.

"It seems only the other day," said the banker, "that Jackson was a slip of a lad in the bank. What a fine young fellow he's developing into. Scars——"

He stopped shortly, and coughed.

Esther winced; then seemed herself again. She was learning to school her emotions. The grounds were already thronged with folk, and many a young girl, as she watched the carriage roll past, heaved a sigh, and envied the rich banker's daughter. Surely she wanted for nothing!

Some little time after the carriage had passed through, Fred Wilton winked across at Tom Jackson.

"Tom!" he said, "here comes Uncle! Bless him! He's got old Mrs. Cobb and Pollie in charge, and he's looking as proud as an old hen out with a couple of chicks! Just like him! He's never so happy as when he's giving other folk a treat. Doesn't look much like a late chief inspector of Scotland Yard, does he?"

Tom Jackson nodded his head.; then his expression changed and he stared in the opposite direction. A distant cloud of dust was moving along the road. The sound of hoofs had reached his ears.

"Look out, Fred!" he cried sharply, "a runaway horse!"

Crump also had seen and heard, and was under the same impression. He hustled Mrs. Cobb and Pollie almost into the ditch. And then, with a remarkable agility, darted after the constables down the road.

"Go for the bridle, and cling on!" he shouted, "but let me have a try first, lads. I've had more experience than you! Let me get ahead. You drop behind! Let me have first shot!"

But there was no need. The horses—there were two—were not runaways. At the sight of the constables the riders reined in sharply.

"What's up?" cried Tom Jackson.

"A woman's escaped from the asylum," answered back one of the men quickly, "when she got away she was wearing the regulation dress. It's a case of looking sharp. She's suffering from suicidal mania; maybe, she got through into the grounds with the crowd, or has gone on to the reservoir!"

"I've been here since ten o'clock," answered Jackson; "no one in the dress has passed this way, I'm certain of that!"

"What's her name?"

It was Crump who asked the question sharply.

"Vance!"

The captive balloon was still up in mid-air, swaying to and fro in the breeze, and the figure, seated daringly in the rigging above the passengers in the car below, was waving a hat to the great, gaping crowd below!

"Vance!" cried Crump; "then, if you'll take my advice, one of you will go into the grounds, and the other ride at full speed to the reservoir!"

Instinctively he had taken command.

The stationary steam-engine, that worked the drum to which the wire that held the balloon was attached, started to pant and snort.

Seaton Revelle had signalled from his perch in the rigging.

The balloon was descending!

[Another splendid instalment of this powerful story will be published next Tuesday.]

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By MADGE MORRIS.

[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* Short Stories.]

Who Should Start It?

You have often, writes "Bessie," advised people to try and get introduced to each other by the aid of mutual friends. Now I know a young man by sight whom I should very much like to meet, and I think he would like to know me. For some time we have come no nearer an acquaintance. Should I make the necessary effort to get introduced or should I leave it to him?

Certainly, you should leave it to him. If he is really drawn towards you he will have more resources to secure the introduction to you than you to him, and further it is for him to make the overtures, not you. You had better wait and see if he makes any such attempts to know you, and if not rest assured that his feeling towards you is not so active as you imagine.

A Case for Caution.

"W. H. L." writes to me to tell me of a strangely sudden infatuation he has formed for a young girl of between sixteen or seventeen, whom he first saw in a provincial town, and afterwards at a place of worship at which both were attending. Her parents are very careful of her, and as to whom she meets. Should my correspondent seek to make her acquaintance, and if so, how. He fears by writing to her father, his intentions might be misunderstood. I think "W. H. L." had better postpone writing to the parent until he has tried other methods of securing a formal introduction. As he says, her father might quite easily be prejudiced against a communication from a strange man.

If he can get an introduction through the medium of mutual friends I do not see that her youth would be so serious a bar to an attachment, if they were on proper social terms. Seventeen is a fault a girl soon grows out of. If the introduction cannot be obtained, he might try and get to know the father on a social basis. This advice, I know, savours very much of intrigue, but there is little doubt that in love it is very difficult to get on without it. "W. H. L." must try his capacities in this direction, and if there is no result, he had better make a frontal attack and place his case direct before the parent, and ask his permission to pay his attentions, explaining at the same time his position and prospects in life. Straightforward conduct of this kind has in more than one case to my knowledge been successful.

Should He Tell Her?

"Should a man tell his *fiancée* everything?" inquires "R. T." "Even when to do so might ruin their happiness?" The circumstances under which he writes are as follows: Early in his life he got into trouble over a money matter and was sent to prison. Since his release he went abroad, started a business in the colonies, and is now a prosperous merchant and engaged to be married. Is it his duty to tell the girl of his early disgrace?

If the nature of "R. T's" early trouble is known to the people with whom he comes into contact, and the stigma in any way still hangs to him, he should certainly make a clean breast of the whole thing. To ask his *fiancée* to tie herself to a man labouring under a disgrace would be an offence beyond condemnation, if she were not made aware of what she was facing. And if "R. T.'s" life will be far away from those who know his past, and where he is unlikely to meet any one who may reveal unpleasant things about him, I do not see why he need be afraid to tell her the truth and assure her that no stigma attaches to him in the place where he will dwell. If she is really fond of him she will not allow this to stand in the way of their union. He will have to break the news to her with skill approaching genius, however, as a clumsy revelation of the fact that her betrothed had been in prison might so terrify her that all would be lost. So try to tell the truth very carefully, "R. T."

A Very Simple Problem.

I don't want to appear unkind, but many of my correspondents put me questions which they should be able to solve themselves with the smallest amount of thought. If my advice can be of real assistance to anyone, I am only too pleased to give it, but there are cases in which one's own common sense is all that is wanted. Now "Dolly Grey" has been for many years continuously in the company of a young man she has known from childhood. Naturally enough on growing older she has found that her feelings towards him have undergone a change, and has fallen in love with another man. But her previous lover still remains devoted to her.

Obviously "Dolly's" duty is to let the latter know the plain truth that she no longer cares for him. It is a very painful task to have to perform, but life is full of such things. Write to him, "Dolly," and tell him exactly what your feelings are, and ask him as a man to cease his attentions. No, I should not ask the intervention of your new sweetheart. That would be an unkind thing to do. Any termination of your affair with his predecessor should be done by yourself. Men never tolerate the intervention of third parties in their love affairs.

A Great Big Shame!

"C. S." is in love with a girl who is only four feet eight in height, while he measures five feet ten. His friends tell him he would regret marrying her, but he is very fond of her and would not wish to give her up. Your friends may be right, "C. S." You have, no doubt, heard the song which describes the sorrows of the man who suffered continually from the nagging of a woman of four feet two, he being six feet three, a fact which the author suggested was "a great big shame." Little women proverbially exercise supreme control over their husbands, so you are facing rather serious possibilities. But what should this matter if you really love her. No, "C. S.," be a man, and do not be distracted from your intentions by the experiences of others. She may not turn out so formidable as you fear.

When is She an Old Maid?

Ethel G. writes to ask at what age does a woman become an old maid. So far as I know there is no recognised boundary line in this country between girlhood and old maidenhood. In France, however, an unmarried woman is an old maid at thirty. She is still a young maid at twenty-nine years, eleven months, and twenty-nine days, but twenty-four hours later she has reached old maidenhood.

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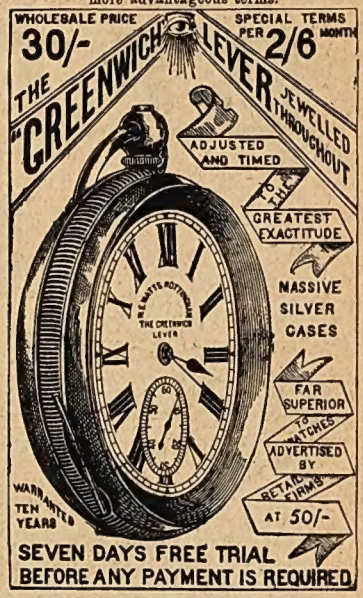

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